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ABSTRACT

This is a highly practical book for the first-year principal or for the assistant principal looking ahead to promotion. In place of abstract generalities, it offers real-life vignettes and scenarios that may be faced by typical first-year principals. The skill checklists are intended to be realistic and unintimidating. Step-by-step explanations are provided for such skills as developing a network or finding mentors. Section 1 reviews technical managerial skills, such as using a personal leadership checklist, meeting skill expectations, and learning to lead by assisting. Section 2 covers socialization, including others' unspoken expectations and the need to learn the school's culture. Self-awareness is the theme of section 3. It points out the benefits of reviewing personal values, of avoiding some of the potential traps of being perceived as a typical boss, and helps the reader to organize a time line for his or her own learning and development. How to develop a support group may be the most important part of this section. The titles of suggested reading at the end of each chapter appear to offer a similar emphasis on practicality and specific skill building. (Contains 30 references.) (RKJ)

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Beginning THE Principalship

2nd Edition

A Joint Publication

CORWIN PRESS

NAESP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A Practical Guide for New School Leaders

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Beginning THE Principalship

2nd Edition

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John C. Daresh

A Joint Publication

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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To Bridget and Stephanie.
And many effective principals,
both beginning and experienced,
who serve as role models and constant reminders
of the importance of quality leadership
for our schools and children.

Introduction

RECENT NEWS STORIES in the United States have announced what many educators have seen as a problem for several years. There is a shortage of people who want to become school principals. This is a major problem for education as a profession, but also for society. We know that one of the most important features of effective schools is that they have strong leadership provided by campus administrators. We now look at a situation where fewer and fewer people want to take on the important role of school principal.

There are many reasons for this situation. For one thing, financial incentives to leave the classroom and go to the principal's office do not have the same drawing power that they did a few years ago. Second, the pressures and demands on principals have increased drastically in a very short period of time. Expectations by legislators, parents, community members for effectiveness and accountability have now made the traditional "hot seat" of administration almost unbearable for many.

There is yet another problem faced by those who would like to see more qualified people consider the principalship as a career choice. Traditionally, people who became principals for the first time have been thrown into the pond filled with all sorts of dangers and frustrations for which they were not prepared prior to taking a first administrative post. Rookie principals have normally been expected to "sink or swim" on their own. They have been put in situations where their performance has been viewed through the same lenses as those used on colleagues with many more years of experience. In short, people considering a move into school administration have no doubt been understandably concerned about such a move when they realized that they would be expected to "hit the ground running," even though the ground seems to become more difficult to tread each day.

In response to this issue, several states have developed programs designed to assist first and second year principals with special programs that feature mentoring, support groups, and a variety of professional development activities. The first edition of this book (and hopefully, this second edition) is used with many such programs that have appeared across the nation. But even if you are a beginning school principal or assistant principal in a place where a specialized support program is not available, the expectation is that reading through the material presented here can help make your first year or two on the job as a school leader a bit more successful and comfortable.

This second edition offers a few changes from the first book. For one thing, the order of the chapters has been modified in a way that should reflect the kinds of concerns you are likely to face in your new job. For example, Section I includes material related to the development of technical and managerial skills—an area shown by research to be the top area of concern for beginners. Section II now includes information to assist you with the process of becoming socialized to your role. Finally, material included in Section III is directed toward helping you address what research has shown may be the most significant issue faced in becoming a formal leader for the first time: self awareness. While the chapter on developing a personal educational platform has been moved toward the end of this book, it is not meant as a signal that this activity is now viewed as any less important than it was a few years ago. However, it is also quite likely that you will want to get a start on making sure that you can manage your school effectively as a high personal priority.

A second major change in this second edition involves the inclusion of a new chapter dealing specifically with how you might make the most of your experience as an assistant principal. The route to the principalship often involves a stay at that level of administration. If your goal is to move into a principalship at some point in the future, and you are now serving as an assistant, it is important that you make the most of that role to ensure that your future role as a school leader will be made even more effective.

As was true of the first edition, the chapters of this book offer some insights into how you, as a new school principal, might be able to find some ways to "walk the tightrope" between surviving your first years on the job and also beginning to serve as a strong and effective instructional leader. As you review each chapter, you should consider the development of a personal portfolio or action plan to guide your work. Many questions are asked throughout the book as a way to help you focus on your planning process.

Nothing will absolutely guarantee your success as an effective principal in the long run. Books such as this one, networks, mentoring relationships, and participation in activities sponsored by professional associations may help, but they will not be sufficient without your hard work and personal commitment to take the first steps toward becoming a school leader. But hopefully you will never feel alone or without a great deal of support as you begin your journey.

1

Why This Book Is Important

David Griswald: A Typical Rookie

DAVID GRISWALD had been an elementary school teacher for about 10 years when he decided that he wanted to do something different from continuing to serve in a classroom. He loved working with children, and he knew that he would miss the world of teaching, but he also wanted some new challenges in his professional life. As a result, he began taking graduate courses in educational administration at nearby Heathrow University with the hope that he would soon qualify for and become an elementary school principal.

David's dream became a reality last spring. He completed all the courses he needed to receive his principal's certificate at the end of the previous winter term, and a few months later, he applied for the principalship at Spirit Lake Elementary School, the smallest and oldest building in the Green Valley School District. It is now October, nearly 4 months after David was named principal and 7 weeks after his first school year began. David continues to be glad about his choice of seeking a principalship, but there are times when the excitement and enthusiasm he felt back in June and July begin to fade. Sometimes David wonders if he wouldn't really rather return to the good old days in his third-grade classroom.

The single most frustrating thing David feels is not that he can't handle the job of managing his school. He has a good secretary and a very experienced and talented teaching staff, and he feels as if he got some very practical things out of the internship he completed last year as part of his Heathrow training. What he is concerned about is the kind of emotional drain this new way of life is causing him. He knew there would be conflicts as an administrator—after all, there's an old saying that "administrators aren't paid to win popularity contests." He is also truly surprised at the number of personnel issues he has to deal with each day. On top of that, he suddenly recognizes how lonely he is beginning to feel in his office. Dr. Pringle, the superintendent of schools, was very supportive when he handed David the keys to his building last summer, but now he rarely comes by to visit, encourage David, or even ask how things are going. The other seven elementary school principals in the district are friendly enough; they invite David to play golf with them every once in a while. But they also are extremely busy with their work at school. And they never want to talk shop when they get together.

All of this makes David Griswald feel very much like a real rookie who has no connection with anyone or anything.

* * *

National surveys conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) have consistently shown that within the next few years, more than half the principals in the United States (and in many other countries around the world) will be in a position to retire and leave the school principalship if they so desire. Also, there is a steady growth in population in many areas in this country. As a result of these factors, more and more people will be going into school principalships for the first time.

At the same time that we will see more and more rookie principals, however, we will also see rapid changes in society. As a result, students are changing drastically, and the business of running schools is changing as well. The principalship has never been an easy job. The last several years have made the job even more demanding and difficult.

On the basis of your experience as a teacher, list some of the ways in which changes in your community, school district, or students have drastically changed your role as a professional educator (for example, perhaps many new students for whom English is not their primary language have been moving into your school district).

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If you are not currently a school principal, you can imagine how the issues listed above have made the life of school principals today different from what it was only a few years ago. If you are a principal, you probably already know that these issues significantly affect your work each day.

The effect that all these changes in society have had on the work of school principals is profound. As a consequence, traditional patterns of accommodating newcomers to principalships are less acceptable. In the past, it was possible for the superintendent to hand the school keys to the new principal and simply advise, "You're the boss now. Try not to foul things up too badly this first year. Learn on the job from those with more experience." Such haphazard approaches to supporting educational leaders first coming on board are not consistent with the increased expectations and demands by parents and other community members that schools become more productive and effective. Simply stated, there is less wiggle room for new principals than ever before. Rookies must now step aboard and perform with the same skill and effectiveness as colleagues who have been in leadership positions for many years.

The beginning principal today often faces a work environment where little or no tolerance is seen for those who might make mistakes. State and federal mandates define much of what principals are supposed to do, whereas central offices and local school board members are less tolerant of errors and poor performance than ever before. And because school administrators now face these same pressures for "perfect" performance, beginning principals are not always able to have supportive relationships with their more experienced colleagues.

This book does not pretend to offer some magic recipes to be followed by beginning principals. There won't be a simple list of 10 or 11 ideas and practices that will always lead you to success. However, I will share insights derived from experiences by other successful educators and also from extensive research on the needs of beginning school principals. A lot has been learned about the kinds of things that might help David Griswald and you as you proceed through the opening stages of your administrative career in schools. One of the most important things discovered over the years is that from the start of your life as a school leader, you can always look at your new job in two very different, often competing, ways:

- How to survive the principalship
- How to be an educational leader

These two ideas are certainly not mutually exclusive. As many school administrators point out, you cannot become a leader of schools if you do not survive your first few days in the principalship. But there are many people who look to the challenge of the principalship only in terms of making it through from one day to the next. They tend to think only in terms of short-term skills—how to stay out of trouble or how not to get fired.

In the chapters that follow, you will certainly learn some of the kinds of things that will help to keep you from losing your job. However, simple survivorship will be only part of what you will learn. The legacy you will share here is that of leadership development—how even the greenest rookie can position himself or herself so that more effective school practice will result. If this stance were not taken, there would be no support here for the best practices of school principals. After all, effective principals will lead effective schools, and effective schools are what all educators are interested in developing and maintaining.

Plan for the Book

In this book, I will review many of the issues and concerns often faced by beginning principals. These concerns are described through a conceptual framework developed and explained in Chapter 2. A statement of some of the problems faced by beginners and some strategies you might wish to follow in dealing with these problems is included.

Later chapters explore other aspects of life as a new school principal, and each chapter looks at one or more of the major issues faced by beginning principals. For example, Chapter 9 discusses the value of developing a clear educational platform, or statement of professional values, to guide your work. This is one method of helping you develop greater self-awareness of your abilities as you assume your new professional role.

An important part of each chapter will be a concluding section in which you are asked to develop a personal plan for improvement and professional development that is consistent with the issues discussed in that chapter. Through this technique, you will be able to create a professional portfolio and personal growth plan that may help you reflect on your first years as a principal. More and more school systems and states in the United States are demanding that administrative personnel create portfolios as a way to guide their personal and professional development. Portfolios are very useful in assisting educators to become more focused on their career needs, but in many cases, they become little more than scrapbooks that include a lot of random, disconnected artifacts. Using your responses in the personal plan sections throughout this book, you can create a portfolio that will become a way to lead you through the next important steps in your career.

Suggested Readings

Additional books that you might wish to consult on issues faced by first-time principals include the following:

Alvy, H. B., & Robbins, P. (1998). *If I only knew . . . Success strategies for navigating the principalship.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Belker, L. B. (1993). *The first-time manager* (3rd ed.). New York: American Management Association.

Carr, C. (1995). *The new manager's survival manual* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley.

Chapman, E. N. (1992). *The new supervisor* (Rev. ed.). Los Altos, CA: Crisp.

Dunklee, D. R. (1999). *You sound taller on the telephone: A practitioner's view of the principalship.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Hill, L. A. (1992). *Becoming a manager: How new managers master the challenges of leadership.* New York: Penguin.

2

A Framework for Understanding the Beginning Principalship

LESS THAN 10 YEARS AGO, concerns of beginning principals were not really considered important by educational researchers. The truth of that statement is readily apparent if you take time to glance at the literature in educational administration over the past 50 years. Many books and articles focus on the role of the principal, of course. We know a lot about the duties of principals, the kinds of conceptual and practical skills that must be demonstrated, and we even have excellent descriptions of what the life of a school principal is like. Although it may be criticized by what appears to be a sexist bias in the title, Harry Wolcott's (1973) study *The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography* is still viewed by many as the best analysis of what building administrators (men *and* women) do on a daily basis.

Because of the recognition of a critical need for new people to move into principalships across the United States, however, there has been an equivalent understanding that research on the world of novice administrators would not only be interesting but important as a way to inform the development of policies and practices. This chapter looks at some of the most recent analyses of the work of beginning principals and uses this research to establish a method in which you could compare the kinds of issues you face with what other principals faced when they first came on board.

Case Study: Figuring Out the Papers

Tashika Woodburn was in the first 2 weeks of her first principalship of an elementary school. She had waited for nearly 3 years after completing the required university courses that would qualify her for a state administrative certificate before she actually applied for a position.

Like many other beginning principals, Tashika got word during the summer that she had landed her first administrative post. It was actually mid-July before she received final, official approval of her appointment from the school board of the Apple Junction Schools. She attended the board meeting in which she was introduced as the new principal of Big Fjord Primary, a small but well-respected school in the district. The next day, Tashika proudly went to the central office to get her keys, policy manual, and all other assorted paraphernalia, mail, and notes left from the previous principal. She skimmed over the mound of paper in front of her, and suddenly she began to get uneasy about her new job. She knew that a big part of her work as a school principal would involve keeping records and filling out forms, but she was already nearly overwhelmed by the procedures for filling out district forms, completing state department of education report sheets, and responding to the memos, correspondence, and other paperwork that filled her incoming mail basket. She had a lot of similar paper to deal with as a teacher, but that experience was minimal compared to what she was now experiencing as a regular part of her administrative world.

Case Study: Am I Supposed to Go?

Dan Carter was very happy to become an elementary principal in the Hightower Independent Schools. For the past 2 years, while he completed courses leading to administrative certification, he had dreamed of stepping in as a principal. The night in June when the board of education approved his appointment was a great time for Dan and his family. Everyone came to that board meeting, and afterward there was a nice reception for Dan and the three other new elementary school principals in the district. Dan noted that all the elementary principals in the district also attended the board meeting, so he penciled in the first and third Tuesday of every month as an evening when he would be away from home, sitting in on school board meetings.

In July, Dan went to both school board meetings. He wasn't terribly surprised when he saw that he was the only principal in attendance. After all, his more experienced colleagues were probably on vacation. Veterans deserved to miss the ceremonies every once in a while, and as a rookie, he had a right to be gung ho this first month.

When August came around and all the principals in the district were due back in town for the next school year, Dan went to both school board meetings. Again he noted that he was the only building principal in attendance. He expected some recognition from the superintendent, and he hoped he would get some brownie points for showing up at board meetings. However, there was not even a hint that the superintendent saw him in the middle of the boardroom. Dan had now spent about 14 hours over the past 2 months attending school board meetings, none of which had even the slightest relevance to his role as a school principal in the district.

Enough was enough. In September, Dan did not attend the first Tuesday board meeting of the month. He decided that staying home with his family was worth more than the recognition he was likely to get from the central office administrators for being a good company man by attending yet another board meeting. However, when the district principals had their monthly gathering with the assistant superintendent for administrative services on the Wednesday following the first board meeting of the month, Dan was the focus of considerable derision from some of his colleagues. "Hey, rookie, you didn't make it to the board meeting last night," noted Rob Gretzky, one of the more experienced principals in the district. "The superintendent scanned the room and noticed the principals who weren't there. You won't hear anything directly, but the superintendent has a long memory."

Dan felt bad, but he knew that this was the first board meeting of the new school year, so he assumed that he would now be expected to attend board meetings every 2 weeks. In the third week of September, however, he again appeared at the board meeting but discovered that he was the only building administrator present. The superintendent stared blankly at him.

"What the heck am I supposed to do with these board meetings?" Dan asked Mary Martinez, an elementary principal who had been in the district for more than 10 years. "I show up and I'm the only principal there, so the boss gets mad. I don't show up, and I hear the boss gets mad. Am I being set up here for a big fall, or what?"

Mary smiled at Dan's frustration. "I guess it is a little hard to walk into a place that's had a history. You've got to be able to read the signs, Dan. When the superintendent wants us to show up at board meetings, such as when the board is scheduled to do anything with curriculum, you'd better be there. Otherwise, the boss wants to be the show himself. Read your advance board meeting agenda very carefully on the Friday before the next board meeting."

The revelation about the "signs" hit Dan like a ton of bricks. From that point on, he figured out the system and didn't miss an important meeting.

Case Study: I'm No Politician

Karen Carlisle had been waiting for the past 2 years for the day when she could take her first principalship. Despite many obstacles, she persisted in her efforts to complete a program of studies leading to certification at a local university. She interviewed with several school districts before she was given her first big chance to take over a principalship of a small but well-regarded elementary school in a community near her home. Like many other school administrators, she found out that she was to be a new principal only a few weeks before the next school year was to start. Still, she was on cloud nine as August wore on and she got ready for the arrival of her teachers, classified staff, and most important, her students.

Karen was especially looking forward to working effectively with her teachers on a daily basis. For years as a classroom teacher, she was concerned about the fact that principals seemed to be getting further away from their instructional duties. Karen saw this first job as an opening for her to get into a school and truly become an instructional leader. She would devote her time to working with students, teachers, staff, and parents in her school. Not only was this a personal goal, but it seemed to be an idea that was strongly supported by the school district and superintendent. When she stated that her goal was to "take first things first" in her school by working with the people in her immediate community, the interviewing team and superintendent all said that was exactly the attitude they wanted to see in a new principal.

Things appeared to be going well for Karen in her first few weeks as a principal. However, about a month into the school year, she received a call from Dr. Dan Adams, who explained that he was the president of a local community organization that had been formed to ensure that schools would be sensitive to the needs of businesses in town. It was a very pleasant conversation, and Karen explained to Dr. Adams that she appreciated his call, but that for the moment, she could not become actively involved with organizations in the community that did not work directly with her students, parents, and teachers. After all, she was the principal of a small elementary school in which very few parents were directly involved with the local chamber of commerce. Karen thought to herself that the group headed by Dr. Adams had very little apparent connection with her world and that her time was better spent keeping to her original goals.

As the year progressed, however, Karen received a number of subtle signs from the central office and parents in her school to the effect that Dr. Adams's group was not pleased by being turned away from her school. Karen began to understand that what seemed to be a task unconnected to her world as a building principal was having more and more of a negative effect on her daily life as a school administrator.

* * *

These three brief scenarios have been deliberately selected to illustrate three classic situations representing the kinds of issues faced by many rookie school principals. In the first case, Tashika Woodburn is a beginning principal faced with the enormous demands of her new job: Papers fill her desk, her superintendent wants answers to every question "right now," and the district policy manual seems to be staring at Tashika in a way that suggests she had better know every one of its intricate details before she dares to do anything, or else she would be perceived as an incompetent rookie.

Research related to the needs and concerns of beginning principals has shown that Tashika's concerns are common. They are often referred to as the "technical" or "managerial" side of the principalship. They involve the operational details that provide direction and order for a school. Some might even say these skills are needed to "keep the trains running—on time." Included may be such tasks as making certain that the policies of the district are followed and that state rules and regulations are complied with. It involves keeping things in line with the formal duties and job descriptions of principals.

The technical side of the principalship also involves properly overseeing and maintaining accounts and the school budget, maintaining effective relations with parents and others in the community, developing a weekly schedule of important events and activities, delegating responsibilities to others, keeping student discipline and a safe and orderly physical environment in the school, resolving disputes, and ensuring that all terms of the district's master contract or negotiated agreement with the teachers' association are always addressed. These technical and managerial issues are often referred to as the "beans, buses, and budgets" dimension of school administration.

It would be incorrect to leave the discussion of important technical demands of the job without noting that for many beginning principals, a major stumbling block is not solely the inability to do certain managerial tasks associated with their job. In fact, they may be quite skilled at doing some of the things required in their job descriptions. Rather, many beginners have significant problems because they lack strong communication skills: They know what to do, but they cannot communicate to others *why* they must do what they do. That lack of communication involves both written and oral expression skills. The critical issue here is that even the best administrative "technician" with the best ideas and motives for managing the school can fail if others do not understand what is taking place.

What are some of the technical and managerial aspects of your job as a school principal that concern you in the early stage of your career? (For example, have you discovered that you are not terribly confident about budgeting or the use of technology as part of your daily job requirements?)

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The second case study, in which Dan Carter had a hard time understanding when he should or should not attend school board meetings, is also representative of problems often reported by novice school principals. In short, the research refers to them as "problems with socialization." These types of concerns are often related to two different points: socialization to the norms and culture within a particular school district and socialization to the profession of educational administration in general.

Dan Carter was experiencing frustration in his new job because he could not figure out how to read the subtle signs of what was going on in his new environment. It made sense to him to attend school board meetings, but he could not understand why he was discouraged from being present at some meetings, whereas at other meetings, he seemed to be in trouble when he was absent. He could see no rational pattern. What Dan did not appreciate was some of the background history that was known to the senior principals in the district.

Not knowing about the culture, traditions, and history of schools and school districts often hinders new principals in their ability to do their jobs. This gets played out in a variety of different ways. Informal "dress codes," participation in administration social events (e.g., holiday parties, golf outings, etc.), or even how to address the superintendent's secretary (e.g., never use a first name or always use a first name) are all examples of the little things that a newcomer needs to understand.

List other examples of the some of the local traditions, cultures, or past practices that you have discovered as part of your new setting. (For example, perhaps you've discovered that Fridays in your school are traditionally dress down days for staff or that teachers don't talk business at the table during lunch.)

The second type of socialization problems often faced by new principals is found in learning about the culture of the principalship as a career. Here, we are talking about trying to understand the big picture of how principals are supposed to act, what they are supposed to know, and even what they are supposed to do, when compared with colleagues across the United States. Perhaps the best way to summarize this area is with the question "So, what does a principal look like?"

Many new principals become so focused on surviving their first years on the job that they ignore the importance of learning what is going on in the professional world outside their own vision. They are unaware of the critical issues that colleagues in their own state and across the country are facing. In recent years, it has been amazing to see the number of principals who were blindsided by issues that were faced by principals in other parts of the country. An example might be the ways community pressure groups have focused on such apparently harmless curricular innovations as outcomes-based education and made these practices the center of considerable controversy. It is understandable that local principals feel as if they must tend to local issues first. However, at the same time, national trends are underway that will eventually affect the local scene. The fact that beginning principals are not being socialized to the larger profession often makes the kind of continuing communication with the "outside world" into a serious problem.

In the space below, jot down a few additional issues that you have discovered are faced by other principals across the United States and that you must also face in your first few years on the job. (For example, has your school or district had to address the issue of allowing prayers in school? What about issues of school safety? How about the arrival of large groups of students from underdeveloped Third World nations?)

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The third case was that of Karen Carlisle, the new principal who was surprised to discover that her work as an elementary principal would also need to include some time as a link with important groups in the community. She could not maintain her personal image of a principal being involved only with the business within the walls of her school. Although it may not have been a part of her personal vision of the principalship, she was learning that certain political responsibilities come with the turf.

Researchers have found this viewpoint in many beginning principals. Often, it is connected with becoming effectively socialized to a new role or having an awareness of self. Other examples include new principals who are faced with critical decisions that might be very different from their own sense of personal values or even ethics. Another example is when a beginning principal is faced with the responsibility of evaluating a teacher and knows that the evaluative process may end in the nonrenewal or even termination of that teacher's job. Is it really a part of one's own values and ability to carry out a process that may deprive a colleague of his or her career as a teacher?

Another related situation is where a new principal observes teachers who are not performing effectively but, upon reviewing personnel files, finds nothing but "excellent" or even "superior" ratings from the last principal. Are the perceptions of the new principal incorrect? Have these teachers suddenly become ineffective during the last few months? Or was the previous principal too lenient or unable (or unwilling) to evaluate teachers effectively? Couple this issue with the need for a newcomer to not alienate experienced teachers too quickly, and another important conflict for a novice administrator appears.

All these issues center around the image that a person has in his or her mind about being a principal. In Chapter 9, we will consider some other ways in which a beginning principal must appreciate his or her role as a boss. It is clear, on the basis of many studies of beginning principals, that people often suffer a kind of shock when their personal value system is threatened by the kinds of things they are called upon to do by others. Can you think of any examples of how your personal awareness of what you must do as a principal has been different from what you expected of that role?

Balance Is the Key

In the preceding pages, I described some of the problem areas identified by many researchers in the professional lives of beginning principals. A review of these broad areas —technical skills, socialization, and self-awareness or role awareness—often leads a person to try to understand and generalize along the lines of deciding which area is most important if one is to succeed in the principalship. I must emphasize here that research on beginning principals has shown consistently that *all three* areas are important. In some ways, that makes your job even harder. It is not possible to simply take care of business by doing nothing more than addressing technical skills for the first year or two, for example. This type of logic is often heard among novices who state that they want to get established as good managers first, with the assumption that they can take care of other matters (e.g., socialization and self-awareness) at some time in the future.

Research related to the critical skills that should be demonstrated by successful beginning principals has looked at the issue of how to address the three areas of concern identified earlier. Different groups of educational administrators were asked to indicate their perceptions of the relative importance of certain job tasks that were, in turn, classified as belonging to technical skills, socialization skills, or self-awareness skills. When principals with at least 5 years of experience were asked to rate the importance of individual tasks for success and survival by beginning colleagues, they ranked the three critical skills in the following way:

1. Socialization skills (most important)
2. Self-awareness and role awareness skills
3. Technical and managerial skills (least important)

When superintendents who had recently hired at least one principal for their districts were asked the same question, they ranked the skills as follows:

1. Self-awareness and role awareness skills
2. Socialization skills
3. Technical and managerial skills

Finally, those who were enrolled in university programs leading to certification or licensure ranked the three areas as follows:

1. Technical and managerial skills
2. Socialization skills
3. Self-awareness and role awareness skills

These findings suggest something very important about the nature of issues faced by beginning principals. First, some important differences in the rankings show up clearly. Those who have little or no experience as school principals rate technical skills as the most critical issue that needs to be addressed to be successful. However, as people become more experienced as administrators, they may downgrade the importance of technical skills and identify socialization and self-awareness (coupled with appreciating the expectations of others) as being more critical to effectiveness. Or they develop skills in delegating some technical duties to others. They recognize that although the technical side of the job is important, it does not necessarily mean that it must consume the complete attention of the principal all the time.

Second, whatever the differences may be when comparing one group's perceptions with another, no group indicates that any of the three skill areas is unimportant. In other words, experienced administrators may not indicate that technical and managerial skills are as important as the other areas, but they still include as important the performance of the technical aspects of the principalship. Socialization and self-awareness are more important, but no one should assume that daily managerial duties should not be carried out.

The key to effectiveness and survival is the development of a proper balance between the three critical skill areas. The management of the school (i.e., technical and managerial skills) must be done along with attention to fitting in (i.e., socialization) and the demonstration of knowing what the job is all about and how it affects the individual person (self-awareness and role awareness).

Suggestions for Improvement and Professional Development

Some suggestions for activities that you might carry out to assist in your professional development related to the three critical skill areas include the following.

Technical and Managerial Skills

- Seek an experienced principal in your district to serve as a job coach who can share some tricks of the trade for some of the technical and managerial parts of doing your job more effectively.
- Consider participating in a leadership assessment program such as the Professional Development Inventory developed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). This activity will provide insights to you about your personal strengths and areas needing further development in leadership and management skills.
- Make an agreement with one or more of the experienced principals in your district to allow you to visit their schools and shadow them as they engage in the daily management tasks associated with their jobs.
- Consult with principals who served your school before you arrived to learn about critical issues. Pick the brains of other key actors (i.e., teachers, students, parents, community members) to learn about their expectations for the role of the principal.
- If you are lucky enough to find an experienced secretary outside your door, or if you find teachers with whom you have rapport, ask them for their insights into the kinds of managerial or technical issues that merit special attention in your school.
- Review some of the practical tips presented in Chapter 4.

- Identify short-term workshops or seminars related to more effective performance of the technical aspects of the job that might be sponsored by local, state, or national professional associations.

Socialization

- Work with your job coach and ask questions about the traditions, past practices, and general culture of your school.
- Read carefully a random selection of past school board agendas and minutes and determine if patterns of practice emerge that you need to learn more about.
- Go out of your way to attend lunches, breakfasts, and other social events that might enable you to gain greater insights into some of the shared concerns of your colleagues.
- Spend time getting to know the personality and characteristics of the community within your school. Get to know students, staff, and teachers as people, not simply as these people who happen to come into "your" school each day. After all, the faster it becomes "our" school, the better.
- Listen and watch in the ways described in greater detail in Chapter 7.
- Become an active participant in activities and events sponsored by professional associations of school administrators. Read such publications as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) *Bulletin* and *Principal*, published by the NAESP.
- Work to learn about the "internal and external" realities of your school. Pay attention to and learn about existing (or possible) connections to social service agencies and how to respond to your police department's demands regarding safety issues. Think about how you will respond to mandated zero tolerance policies that are meant to dictate how you will deal with critical discipline issues.

Self-Awareness and Role Awareness Skills

- Identify a personal mentor within either your school district or some other school system to help you get feedback about your career development. This person may or may not be the same person selected as a job coach to help you learn more about technical skills.

- Write and then periodically review your statement of personal professional values, or educational philosophy. Further information about this activity is presented in Chapter 8.
- Work with a trusted colleague who will agree to observe your work for a period of time and ask you to describe what you believe you were doing on the job. Compare and contrast your perceptions with those of someone looking at you from the outside in.
- Consider how you will address the personal stress you will face as you try to balance your time between your job responsibilities and your commitment to your family and personal life.

Building a Personal Plan

In the spaces provided on the next few pages, begin the process of developing a personal professional growth plan, or portfolio, by reflecting on the key concepts described in this chapter and specifying some important goals that you might have related to each major issue. For each goal or set of goals, you need to identify activities that will assist you in achieving these goals. Also note the ways in which you can assess your progress toward these goals and objectives.

Area 1: Technical and Managerial Skill Development

Personal objectives related to this skill area for the next year:

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Some of the things you will do to achieve these objectives:

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The ways in which someone will be able to tell if you have been successful in achieving your objectives:

Area 2: Socialization Skill Development

Personal objectives related to this skill area for the next year:

Some of the things you will do to achieve these objectives:

The ways in which someone will be able to tell if you have been successful in achieving your objectives:

Area 3: Self-Awareness and Role Awareness Skill Development

Personal objectives related to this skill area for the next year:

Some of the things you will do to achieve these objectives:

The ways in which someone will be able to tell if you have been successful in achieving your objectives:

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I

TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL SKILLS

THE NEXT THREE CHAPTERS are devoted to the improvement of your technical and managerial skills. As noted in Chapter 2, if you are first beginning the principalship, these skills are probably your highest priority for development. Although research supports the fact that you will also need to learn about socialization and self-awareness, the material included in this section should be helpful to you in addressing what may come first in your life at this time.

3

A Personal Leadership Checklist

TOM CASEY was enjoying his first year as the principal of Avon Hills High School. For the past 3 years, he was one of the assistant principals in the school, and he had the opportunity to learn about the teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community. It was not a surprise when Tom was named the principal; he knew the school, and the school community knew him.

As Tom moved through his first year, he remained quite comfortable with his assignment, for the most part. It was a continuation of what he had done in the past, and things seemed to be running smoothly. On the other hand, Tom often went home at the end of the day feeling as if something was missing from this year's experience. He wasn't completely confident about how he was doing as a leader. He was sure that others watching his performance would say that he was a good principal. Avon Hills was "working" pretty well, but Tom wished he could get some sense of how well he was really doing as a leader.

* * *

Tom Casey is not unusual. Too often, beginning principals invest so much time in finding their first job, getting the school year started, and keeping their buildings open and well maintained that they have little or no opportunity to check out the effectiveness of their work. Are they doing a good job? Or are they simply staying one step ahead of the next crisis that will land on their desks? School districts, of course, have timelines and procedures to be followed in the evaluation of their administrative personnel. However, these evaluative procedures are often cast in a way that is tied to either merit pay decisions or contract extensions.

Typical evaluation practices for school administrators are designed to assess whether or not people are doing their jobs, not whether or not they are growing professionally and becoming more effective leaders. The result is that principals, whether at the beginning of their careers or after they have had much experience, rarely get any insights into the effectiveness of their work during the school year. We believe this is unfortunate, because it promotes the notion that principals, particularly those new to the job, are meant to direct their efforts toward survivorship, not leadership.

This chapter provides you with an opportunity to reflect on your own leadership style and skills, as compared with the nature of effective educational leadership that is presented in current research literature. The most important part of this process is the expectation that you will conclude your review of the material presented here by identifying some of your personal strengths and limitations. In turn, these may serve as yet another part of your personal professional development portfolio. The goal here is not to indicate those areas where you have problems. Rather, you should be clear about the ways in which you can enhance your role as an educational leader,

Critical Leadership Skills

The number of lists that exist and contain statements of specific skills reportedly needed by effective leaders is probably as long as the number of people who have been appointed leaders over the years. Some of the lists included here that are relevant to this discussion are those prepared by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 1989), Stephen R. Covey (1991), Warren G. Bennis (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 1991), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (Schmitt, Joe, Meritt, Fitzgerald, & Jorgenson, 1982), and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1996).

The ASCD (1989) list notes that effective educational leaders do the following:

1. *They provide a sense of mission to their schools.* They demonstrate the ability to articulate what a school is supposed to do, particularly in terms of what it should do to benefit children.
2. *They engage in participative management.* They encourage a better organizational climate in the school by allowing teachers and staff to participate meaningfully in real decision making and not merely in an effort to "play at" getting people involved when decisions are already made.

3. *They provide support for instruction.* Instructional leaders are so committed to maintaining quality instruction as their primary organizational focus that when decisions must be made concerning priorities, instruction always comes first.
4. *They monitor instruction.* They know what is going on in the classrooms of their schools.
5. *They are resourceful.* Instructional leaders rarely allow circumstances in their organizations to get in the way of their vision for quality educational programs.

Stephen Covey (1991) has noted the following characteristics of what he refers to as "principle-centered leaders":

1. *They are continually learning.* Principle-centered people are constantly educated by their experiences.
2. *They are service oriented.* Those striving to be principle-centered leaders see life as a mission.
3. *They radiate positive energy.* Principle-centered people are cheerful, pleasant, and happy.
4. *They believe in other people.* Principle-centered people don't overreact to negative behaviors, criticisms, or human weaknesses.
5. *They lead balanced lives.* They read the best literature and magazines and keep up with current affairs and events.
6. *They see life as an adventure.* Principle-centered people savor life; they have no need to categorize or stereotype people and events.
7. *They are synergistic.* Principle-centered people serve as change catalysts in organizations, and they improve most situations in which they become involved.
8. *They exercise for self-renewal.* They regularly exercise the four dimensions of the human personality: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Warren Bennis (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) has noted that successful leaders engage in the following five strategies:

1. *Strategy 1: Attention Through Vision.* Leaders develop a focus in an organization or in an agenda that demonstrates an unparalleled concern for outcomes, products, and results.
2. *Strategy 2: Meaning Through Communication.* Effective communication is inseparable from effective leadership.

3. *Strategy 3: Trust Through Positioning.* Leaders must be trusted in order to be effective; we trust people who are predictable and whose positions are known. Leaders who are trusted make themselves known and make their positions clear.
4. *Strategy 4: Deployment of Self Through Positive Self-Renewal.* Leaders have positive self-images and self-regard that are not self-centered, and they know their worth. In general, they are confident without being cocky.
5. *Strategy 5: Deployment of Self Through the "Wallenda Factor."* Before his death, the famous aerialist Karl Wallenda was said to have become more preoccupied with not falling than with succeeding. Leaders are able to consistently focus their energies on success.

Now that you have read these lists of critical skills for leaders that have been identified by ASCD, Covey, and Bennis, select two or three of these skills that you believe others could identify in your style of work as a school principal:

Now, review the three lists again and select two or three skills that you believe may be seen as shortcomings in your style:

Another listing of critical leadership skills has been developed by the NAESP. These skills are somewhat different from the others we have reviewed. They are designed to enable school principals to review the skills they believe may need further refinement and improvement. As you consider each leadership area, take time to assess your own performance in this area as a critical component of your work:

Area 1: Leadership Behavior

The principal must

1. Exercise vision and provide leadership that appropriately involves staff, students, and the community in the identification and accomplishment of the school's mission

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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2. Recognize the individual needs of all staff and students, including those who are at risk because of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and abilities

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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3. Apply effective human relations skills

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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4. Encourage and develop the leadership of others

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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5. Analyze relevant information, make decisions, delegate responsibility, and provide appropriate support and follow-up

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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6. Identify and creatively coordinate the use of available human, material, and financial resources to achieve the school's mission and goals

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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7. Explore, assess, develop, and implement educational concepts that enhance teaching and learning

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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8. Bond the school community through shared values and beliefs

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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9. Initiate and manage constructive change

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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10. Participate actively as a member of local, state, and national professional groups

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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Area 2: Communication Skills

The principal must

1. Articulate beliefs persuasively, effectively defend decisions, explain innovations, and behave in ways that are congruent with these beliefs and decisions

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

2. Write clearly and concisely so that the message is understood by the intended audience

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

3. Utilize basic facts and data and recognize values when communicating priorities

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

4. Demonstrate skills in nonverbal communication, including personal impact, to communicate a positive image of the school

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

5. Use current technologies to communicate the school's philosophy, mission, needs, and accomplishments

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

6. Make effective use of mass media

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

7. Use active listening skills

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

8. Express disagreement without being disagreeable

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

9. Promote student and staff use of higher-level thinking skills

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

10. Exemplify the behavior expected in others

    Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

11. Keep communication flowing to and from the school

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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12. Communicate with the various constituencies within the school community

    Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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Area 3: Group Processes

The principal must

1. Apply the principles of group dynamics and facilitation skills

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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2. Involve staff, parents, students, and the community in setting goals

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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3. Resolve difficult situations by the use of conflict resolution skills

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

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4. Match the appropriate decision-making techniques to the particular situation

Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

5. Identify—in collaboration with staff, students, and parents—the decision-making procedures the school will follow

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

6. Apply the process of consensus building both as a leader and as a member of a group

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

7. Achieve intended outcomes through the use of principles of motivation

   Your personal level of proficiency in this skill:

In addition to these proficiencies related to the leadership responsibilities of school principals, the NAESP suggests that you may wish to review your performance in the following areas as well:

Supervisory Proficiencies

1. Curriculum
2. Instruction
3. Performance
4. Evaluation

Administrative and Management Competencies

1. Organizational management
2. Fiscal management
3. Political management

The NASSP derived another framework from its Assessment Center skill areas. You may wish to periodically review the extent to which you are demonstrating these competencies. This may be an important and useful technique to guide your personal leadership checkup.

Administrative Skill Dimensions

1. *Problem analysis:* the ability to seek out relevant data and analyze complex information to determine the important elements of a problem situation, searching for information with a purpose
2. *Judgment:* the ability to reach logical conclusions and make high-quality decisions on the basis of available information; skill in identifying educational needs and setting priorities; ability to critically evaluate communications
3. *Organizational ability:* the ability to plan, schedule, and control the work of others; skill in using resources in an optimal fashion; ability to deal with a volume of paperwork and heavy demands on one's time
4. *Leadership:* the ability to get others involved in solving problems, to recognize when a group requires direction, and to interact effectively with a group and guide them to accomplish a task
5. *Sensitivity:* the ability to perceive the needs, concerns, and personal problems of others; tact in dealing with persons from different backgrounds; ability to deal effectively with people concerning emotional issues; know what information to communicate and to whom
6. *Decisiveness:* the ability to recognize when a decision is required and act quickly
7. *Range of interests:* competence to discuss a variety of subjects—educational, political, current events, economic, and so on; active participation in events
8. *Personal motivation:* the need to achieve in all activities; evidence that work is important to personal satisfaction; ability to be self-policing

9. *Educational values:* possession of a well-reasoned educational philosophy; reactiveness to new ideas
10. *Stress tolerance:* the ability to perform under pressure and during opposition; the ability to think on one's feet
11. *Oral communication:* the ability to make clear oral presentations of facts or ideas
12. *Written communication:* the ability to express ideas clearly in writing; to write appropriately for different audiences—students, parents, and so on
13. *Conflict management:* the willingness to intervene in conflict situations and the ability to develop solutions that are agreeable to all persons involved
14. *Political astuteness:* the ability to perceive critical features of the environment such as power structure, principal players, and special interest groups; the ability to formulate alternatives that reflect realistic expectations
15. *Risk taking:* the extent to which calculated risks are taken on the basis of sound judgments
16. *Creativity:* the ability to generate ideas that provide new and different solutions to management problems or opportunities

As you read through these 16 competence areas, in which areas do you believe you would like to focus some attention for personal improvement?

For each of these areas in which you would like to improve your performance, what are some specific strategies that you may follow as part of a plan for personal improvement? (For example, if one of the skill areas identified for improvement is written communication, you may wish to enroll in a writing course at a local college or simply ask a friend to critique your written memos, letters, and so on.)

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One final framework of critical leadership skills you may wish to consult is one that has been developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 1996). This group, supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), was formed to promote the adoption of national standards to guide the preservice preparation, licensure, and continuing professional development of American educational leaders. The group has proposed six broad outcome standards, with corresponding statements of expected knowledge, dispositions, and performance expectations tied to each standard. The six standards are presented below, along with a detailed description of the component elements of the first standard.

Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Knowledge: The administrator has knowledge and understanding of

- Learning goals in a pluralistic society
- The principles of developing and implementing strategic plans
- Systems theory
- Information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies
- Effective communication
- Effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

Dispositions: The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to

- The educability of all
- A school vision of high standards of learning
- Continuous school improvement

- The inclusion of all members of the school community
- Ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults
- A willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and practices
- Doing the work required for high levels of personal and organizational performance

Performance: The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that

- The vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities
- The core beliefs of the school vision are modified for all stakeholders
- The vision is developed with and among stakeholders
- The contributions of school community members to the realization of the vision are recognized and celebrated
- Progress toward the vision and mission is communicated to all stakeholders
- The school community is involved in school improvement efforts
- The vision shapes the educational progress, plans, and activities
- The vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions
- An implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated
- Assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals
- Relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals
- Barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed
- Needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals
- Existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals
- The vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored and revised

Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

As was the case with the other descriptions of important leadership skills, you may wish to list here some areas where you will focus future professional development activity.

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Your Personal Plan

An assessment of your leadership skills can serve as an important foundation for a personal portfolio and growth plan. This chapter included several different frameworks that have been developed to assist people in analyzing certain research-based competencies needed to lead schools. You may wish to consider these skills, or you may want to consider other issues that you will need to face as a school principal. For example, how effective are you in seeking and securing additional resources for your school? After all, a reality of present-day education is that it will be increasingly important for educators to become grant writers, because traditional sources of financial support are often not sufficient to allow schools to reach their goals. Other similar kinds of skills and abilities may also come to mind.

In the space below, identify some of your strengths and some of your weaknesses with regard to the leadership skills identified throughout this chapter. For each item, identify a timeline that you intend to follow in either strengthening that skill or finding ways to increase your personal skills. Note also some of the activities or strategies you believe may assist you in your improvement effort. (For example, "I will increase the effectiveness of my public speaking or oral communication skills over the next school year by participating in the local Toastmasters' Club and also by volunteering often to make public addresses.")

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Expectations for Technical and Managerial Skills

NATE SPENCER stood at the front door of Martin Avenue Elementary School with a key to the building in his right hand and suddenly realized that at least for the next year of his life, he would be the principal of this school. This was a job he had looked forward to for quite a while. Last spring, Nate applied for principalships that were advertised in five different school districts close to where he had been a teacher for the past 11 years. In total, Nate went through 12 different interviews with different groups of parents, teachers, central office administrators, community group members, students, and sometimes school board members. In some cases, he had done well, and in a few situations, he had really bombed out. So when he finally got a phone call to take over at Martin Avenue, he leaped at the chance to prove that he could do a great job as principal.

Today, however, he started to get some feelings of apprehension as he walked through the front door of his new school. He had learned a lot from his administrative internship last year, a requirement for administrative certification through Wheatland University. He had a particularly good role model in the principal who worked with him during that period. Nate also felt as if he had gotten some very practical information while he was taking graduate courses at Wheatland. Now, however, he realized that he was in charge and that he was responsible for making things happen at his school.

As he settled in at his new desk, he started to sift through the enormous pile of papers that were laid neatly in his in basket by Martha Delvechio, his secretary. She now stood before him, notebook in hand, waiting for directions concerning what might be the order of business to be followed during the next few weeks before the school year started. Martha said that one of the first things she had always done with the previous principal was to set up a tentative schedule to be followed during the school year. In that way, she and Nate could develop a tickler file that they could consult each day to remind them of events that needed to be addressed as the year progressed.

Nate thought that Maria had a great idea, but the newness of the job, the thought of being "the boss," and all the assorted things that had to be done to learn about a new school, a new school system, and a new job made Nate realize that he had not given any thought in the past to what had to be done in terms of technical skills and practices needed to make this a successful first year on the job.

* * *

Nate's situation is not unique. Often, people spend so much time thinking about how to do individual tasks associated with the principalship (e.g., how to manage a building budget, how to observe and evaluate teachers, or how to pay attention to legal mandates) that they never think in terms of the big picture of leading a school for an entire year. Alternatively, they also frequently find themselves in situations much like Nate's: They spend a lot of time worrying about and working toward getting their first job and often walk into the position without really considering a lot of the details involved in what they are supposed to do. These are both realistic situations beginners often face, and they are concerns not remembered by experienced colleagues who often do things on the basis of their experience.

Some Apparent Contradictions

The most critical skills that must be addressed by any beginning principal concern developing an appreciation for personal values and beliefs. As a result, this chapter might seem contradictory, because it looks at the important areas of technical and managerial skills needed for principals to succeed in their jobs. Often, people speak of administrative skills in a negative way. They talk about the "three Bs of school administration: beans, buses, and budgets." The implication is that being an effective school leader is something well beyond mere management. But a person can never serve as a true leader if he or she does not also survive as a manager. The job has to be done.

This chapter looks at the technical and managerial side of the principal's job. The goal here is to present an overview of the many tasks that need to be done each year by school principals and work with you to set up a schedule for carrying out these tasks. Some of the items might be classified as formal or mandated activities that are required by state law, collective bargaining agreements, or local school board policy. Exact dates will vary in different school districts or states. Other important technical duties need to be done by effective principals, even if they are not officially required.

Formal Requirements

You must do a number of things each year because they are formal requirements of the job. If you miss the deadlines associated with these tasks, you may be in violation of contracts, local policies, or even state and local laws. As a result, these items cannot be allowed to simply slip once in a while. You could lose your job or be held personally and legally liable if you do not meet these deadlines and due dates.

Deadlines are important, but they are listed in formal memos, the district's weekly calendar of events, job descriptions, board policies, and a wide array of other places that will make them relatively hard to ignore. Few principals are wholly unprepared for the fact that, for example, they must complete the evaluations of untenured teachers in their buildings by a certain date. This is an important technical and managerial task that you must address, but it is not a subtle issue that is easy to forget most of the time.

Informal Tasks

Informal tasks are the things you will not necessarily find listed in the local school district's board policy manual or in the school code for your state or even in the terms of the negotiated contract for your local teachers' association. However, failure to do some of these things might make a difference in how you are able to carry out your job as a principal. They are the kinds of things that—as experienced principals have discovered over the years—make the school year run a bit more smoothly and reduce tensions and frustrations not only for you but also for your staff, students, and the community with whom you will work.

The next few pages will list some of the important things—both formal and informal—that need to be done throughout the school year. The lists indicate activities that should be performed before the year begins, during the year, and toward the end of the school year to ensure that next year will be easier than this one. Some suggestions fit nicely and cleanly into one of these three periods; others do not because they must be addressed throughout the year.

Before the Year Begins

Most people get their first administrative assignments during the summer, before the new school year begins. In an ideal world, you might be selected as a principal in

May or June, with an understanding that your contract officially begins on July 1 and that teachers will be back by mid-August, 2 or 3 weeks before students arrive. In that ideal world, then, you might have a few months to plan for the next year; check over your school; learn about the students, teachers, staff, and school district; and so on. In the real world, however, you might receive your first principalship only a few weeks (or days) before the school year begins.

Regardless of the situation in which you find yourself, you can do a number of things in the months, weeks, or even days before teachers and students walk into your school. These activities are classified in several different areas: building preparation; materials and supplies; communications with staff, students, parents, and community; and finally, perhaps most critical, personal preparation.

Building Preparation Activities

The following activities may help you to prepare for your first year in the principalship:

- Walk around your school with your chief custodian and check out the overall cleanliness and state of repair; notify the custodial staff of areas needing attention. While making your assessment, develop a priority system to indicate what things must be done first. For example, are there safety and health concerns? What about things that affect instruction? Comfort for students, teachers, and staff? Appearance?
- Examine the lighting throughout the school.
- Look over such often forgotten but important areas as ventilation, signs of water damage, plumbing problems, and electrical hazards.
- Learn about your building's fire alarm system and security systems and how to operate, override, and disconnect them if necessary.
- Verify that things ordered by the previous principal were actually done in your building for this year (e.g., were structural changes, repairs, etc., actually carried out by the custodial staff or contractors?)
- Check over the external conditions of your building during the summer months—and remember that the outside of your building, including the grounds around it, is what the public sees every day.
- Update teacher and staff mail locations to reflect new staff members. (Remember that you probably won't be the only new kid in school next year. Making certain

that little things like mailbox arrangements are taken care of is a way to avoid annoying the teachers who are familiar with the ways things "are supposed to be.")

- Learn about your building's idiosyncrasies, hidden rooms, and so forth. (This is particularly an adventure in older buildings, or areas where several wings have been added over the years. Often, you will find small closets in gyms, auditoriums, and other similar areas of the school.)
- Contact your district's security office or local police department and have them lead you through a security and safety audit of your campus. (This is, unfortunately, a precaution needed in the times we now face in many public institutions, including schools. The aim here is to inform you, not frighten you.)
- Form a relationship with your district's custodian supervisor or administrator. (This person can get you through some tough confrontations with reluctant custodians or repair people.)
- Do whatever you and your staff can do to make the building as neat, clean, safe, and attractive as possible for the first day that your teachers return. (This little step will have a big effect on morale!)
- Arrange your office so it reflects you and your personal style: move the desk, put up photos and plants, and so on. (This strategy really tells people a lot about you very quickly.)

Materials and Supplies

- Learn the location of supply closets, storage rooms, and so on.
- Check to see if materials that were ordered last spring were delivered this summer; if not, contact the vendors to find out why.
- Review supplies and materials inventory procedures.
- Make certain that you have an ample supply of forms (e.g., budgeting forms, leave request forms, insurance forms, discipline referral forms) on hand to start the year so that you will not have to bother the central office for this material after the year starts.
- Make certain that such things as student and staff handbooks are ready to be distributed as soon as the new year begins.

Communications With Staff, Parents, Community, and Students

- Send out letters of introduction to parents and staff; invite people to stop in at the office to meet you during the summer. (This is particularly important for teachers who might not know much about you, where you came from, or a lot of other information that was not generally known by all the teachers during your hiring process.)
- Take your building staff (secretaries, custodians, and cafeteria workers) out to lunch. Or at least make certain to spend a significant amount of one-on-one time with each of these very important people before the school year begins.
- Listen and learn as much as possible about the local culture of your school, your neighborhood, and the school district. Who are some of the local heroes? And are there any legends to learn? (Even if you came to this school from another building in the same district, this is an important tip.)
- Meet with PTA/PTO officers, booster club officers, or any other organized parent groups that will be part of your school community.
- Work with experienced personnel to identify local community groups, individuals, or organizations. (Do not offend important locals.)
- Identify important contact people in community social service agencies, the police department, and so on. Find time to make personal visits to the people you may need to call on in emergencies after the year starts. (People will remember and always respond more quickly to requests from people they know.)
- Form school business partnerships, if possible. Maintain any partnerships started in the past.
- Prepare a "welcome back" letter to your parents and students and send it out so that it will arrive about a week before the school year officially begins. (And remember to carefully proofread this letter and all other messages sent from your office so they contain no errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar; you are on stage every time you send something out into the community!)
- Prepare a "welcome back" letter (and address it personally) to each teacher and staff member. (Talk about what you want to do in school, but *please* avoid educationese!)
- Do not pass up invitations to important local and traditional events (the superintendent's cookout, the teachers' family picnic, etc.) or seemingly unimportant community events (the annual pumpkin festival, etc.). Every one of these events is an opportunity to learn more about the culture and show your sincere interest in the people who will be central to your success.

- Prepare the daily announcements and newsletters for the first week of the school year well in advance of the big day. Also, prepare the agenda for your first staff meeting.
- Read local newspapers; subscribe to one if you live in another community.

Curriculum

- Learn the teaching culture of the school. Are teams used? Are there teachers who have always excelled as loners? Who will work well with whom?
- Familiarize yourself with last year's test scores on any standardized measures; learn the schedule for administration for this next year.
- Review the district curriculum and graded course of study (if one exists); make certain that teachers have copies of, or at least access to, curriculum guides (as mandated by local or state policy).
- Learn about special education or inclusion programs that are followed in the district, and consider the implications for your building.
- Meet with the district's director of curriculum to learn about additional specifics of curriculum planning and development in your system.

Personal Preparation

- Read those journals that you previously put aside and learn about some major trends in education that you might be facing as a principal. (Many things that seemed irrelevant to you when you were a teacher may now have major consequences for your leadership role.)
- Talk to people to learn about special school traditions, events, and customs.
- Set up a tentative monthly plan of events for next year. Set up a tickler file to remind you of significant deadlines or timelines that you will need to meet or follow.
- Set up your personal phone filing system on your desk; program speed dials for frequent telephone numbers; set up your e-mail account and system.
- Visit with a few local experienced principals to set the stage for future collegial relations.

After the Year Starts

The temptation you will face as the school year begins is to settle in as the new principal and wait for some issues to come to you. That will certainly happen. However, you must persist in making a plan that will enable you to anticipate some major events and crises that you will face as a new principal. Some of these things will take place at the beginning of the year, and some will come later. But be prepared.

Some of the common issues you are likely to face throughout the year in a number of different areas are as follows:

Building and Physical Plant Activities

- Keep an eye out for any unusual signs of wear and tear in the building, particularly as these might be related to the health and safety of students and staff.
- Carry out fire drills, tornado drills, and other forms of disaster drills as required by local laws and district policy.
- Make certain that custodial staff follow through on all assignments.
- Keep an eye on graffiti and vandalism around the school and make certain that, wherever possible, these problems are taken care of quickly; do not let your walls and property become a place where graffiti and tagging are acceptable.
- Make certain that hallway displays and bulletin boards are changed periodically throughout the year.
- Use the building as a symbol of openness and welcome to visitors from the community.

Materials and Supplies

- Make certain that supplies ordered during the summer arrive and are distributed to your staff.
- Oversee the use of consumable supplies throughout he building (e.g., chalk, paper) to prevent an interruption of material in midyear.

Communications With Staff, Students, Parents, and Community

- Work with colleges and universities to identify appropriate placement procedures for student teachers who will be working in your building throughout the school year.

- Establish and monitor appropriate parent and community volunteer programs.
- Review standing committee structures; establish new committees where needed to carry out important work in your school.
- Plan parent meeting dates for the year with your staff, PTA and PTO, booster clubs, and so on.
- On a continuing basis, make certain to communicate all important dates for the year with your staff.
- Follow all established dates and procedures related to teacher and staff evaluations for the year.
- Get to know assistant principals (and also the informal leaders in your school) with whom you will be working; be particularly sensitive to the need to work with any assistant principals who might have been competitors for your job.
- Develop a clear roster of staff duties and special assignments.
- Work with local colleges and universities in the placement of student teachers and interns in your building.
- As time permits, visit as many classes as often as possible.
- Review teacher lesson plans periodically, check on grading practices, and share with teachers your expectations regarding student performance. (This practice might require some explanation to teachers for whom this practice may seem new or may be "something we've never done before around here.")
- Learn the local culture of the school as it relates to formal and informal holidays and events. (For example, is Valentine's Day always a big day at your school? Do you have large numbers of teachers and students who observe certain religious holy days each year, thus increasing the likelihood that absentee rates will be high on some dates that are not listed as official holidays on your calendar? Does your district have a formal policy covering such days?)

System Responsibilities

- Learn the mandated census dates for your state (i.e., the official date on which enrollment must be reported to the district and state educational agency).
- Work with appropriate district personnel to learn procedures associated with establishing your building budget for the next year. (You will likely have an absolute deadline for this material to be submitted to the central office; do not underestimate the amount of time that may be needed to carry out the task and meet the deadline.)

- Learn what is required and gather data systematically and continuously for the school's annual report that will have to be submitted to the central office at some point toward the end of the school year. (Again, this task is much simpler and more effective if you do not wait until the last minute to gather relevant data.)
- Systematically document your personal and professional accomplishments. (This will come into play when it is time for your performance appraisal and also in the future when you may be seeking a different position.)
- Develop a staffing plan for the following year. This should reflect such predictable events as the retirement of some of your teachers and the need to recruit replacements.
- Make certain to meet all deadlines for the completion of important tasks such as the evaluation of untenured teachers, first-year teachers, tenured faculty, and classified staff, and supervision of activities and athletic programs, planning for substitute teachers, and so on. Also, comply with all stated procedures for reporting the results of the evaluations to all involved and concerned parties.

Toward the End of the Year

The last few months and weeks of every school year are a big part of your job, because many annual events pile up and you need to make certain they are completed. Most important, the way in which you bring about closure to one school year often influences how successfully the next year will start. Do you remember all the things you discovered last summer and wished that the previous principal had taken care of them before you got there? Think what it would be like if you were the person who inherits your work from this year, and plan accordingly.

Building Maintenance

- Work with your district facilities manager and the head custodian in your building to identify major work and improvements that need to be done after the school year has concluded (e.g., roofing, access ramps, window repairs, parking lot improvements, lighting).
- Establish a summer cleaning schedule with your building custodial staff; include minor repairs and plans for storing and securing equipment and materials during the summer months.

- Check on instructional materials and other needed supplies for each grade level (elementary schools) or subject department (secondary schools) used throughout the building (e.g., replace teacher manuals, overhead transparencies, and duplication masters, where needed).
- Involve teachers in providing input concerning modifications that might be needed in their individual classrooms (e.g., adding window shades, bulletin boards, display boards, or lighting fixtures, and replacing damaged furniture, which might be installed during the summer).

Instructional Materials

- Learn how textbooks and other instructional materials distributed at the beginning of the school year are accounted for; are they to be stored in a central location or in individual classrooms?
- Survey teachers to determine additional instructional materials and equipment that may be needed next year.
- Collect from teachers grade books, lesson planning books, attendance records, and other materials that may be helpful to you when you are talking with parents, students, and central office administrators in the absence of teachers during the summer months.

Communication With Students, Parents, Teachers, and Staff

- Get ready for end-of-the-year award ceremonies by purchasing plaques, certificates, and trophies well in advance of the dates of the ceremonies.
- Distribute a survey to parents to determine their perceptions of the overall program effectiveness in the school.
- Distribute a survey to teachers to determine their perceptions of the quality of the school's program. In addition, if you are comfortable with your staff and also your sense of work as a principal, you may also wish to ask teachers to rate your performance during the school year. (You may want to find out if surveys like this have been done in the past at your school. Also, consider carefully the messages that may be conveyed to staff when such a survey is administered. What are you going to do with the surveys? Or will people think that this practice is all show but no substance? Remember that teachers do not want to waste their time with meaningless activities.)

- Send thank-you notes to your immediate supervisors, the district maintenance department, and others who have helped you survive your first year.
- Order and distribute special gifts (e.g., flowers, gift certificates) to parent volunteers.
- Sponsor a special social event (e.g., breakfast, tea) for parent volunteer groups, booster clubs, and so on.
- Send an individual, handwritten note of thanks to each teacher and staff member in your building. (Yes, even if you have a big building! A few hours of personal investment by you and a little writer's cramp will have a great payoff in the future.) Be specific about the contributions that you appreciate and are rewarding.
- Inform teachers and staff members about possible summer workshops, seminars, and other professional enrichment opportunities sponsored by your district, the state department of education, the local business community, and so on.
- Sponsor thank-you luncheons for your office and custodial staff.
- Submit your annual report to the central office.
- Share with staff members strategies or techniques that might be helpful in the improvement of school practices. This should be done in the spring so that staff can begin to plan for further discussion of these strategies next year.
- Alert staff to new districtwide programs and priorities that may affect activities in individual schools next year. Again, sharing this information in the spring will make work in the fall much easier and productive.
- Lead the staff in discussions about possible concerns that will be addressed next year. Formulate committees, encourage open dialogue during staff meetings, and plan ahead for staff inservice sessions that might be necessary next year.

General Management

- Plan the school's master schedule for next year.
- Provide room assignments for next year.
- Make sure that your local school policies are consistent with the directions you want to promote for your educational program next year.
- Carry out student retention reviews for next year.
- Develop a tentative duty roster for next year.

- Review and set student activity fees for next year (and seek approval from your school board, if necessary).
- Plan and coordinate (and delegate direct responsibilities to others) such normal spring activities as the spring student play, prom, sporting events, graduation ceremonies, and so on.

I will conclude this listing of tasks that need to be done during different moments in your first year with two observations. First, this list is not exhaustive; it does not include all that you might need to do. Undoubtedly, you may find other important activities in your situation, and some of what is listed may never be relevant to you. Second, I am not suggesting any priorities. It is not more important, for example, to send thank-you notes to the district's custodial supervisor than it is to engage staff in goal setting for the next year. You must make your own determination of what tasks must be done first. But it is a critical decision to make.

Building a Personal Plan

This chapter dealt with a review of many of the important technical skills that a new leader needs to master to become a proactive and effective leader. I suggested a large number of tasks as possible activities you may wish to carry out before the school year begins, after the year has started, and also in preparation for the closing of a school year. As you may have noted, a lot of things must be accomplished, but I hope you will not become overwhelmed with the enormous responsibilities of your job. My goal is to help you develop an understanding of major issues that need to be addressed in a systematic way. This type of proactive planning will assist you in becoming a true leader, not simply becoming a reactive manager of the next crisis.

On these last few pages, consider your own situation and identify some important tasks that you will need to address throughout the school year. In listing the specific tasks, make certain that you do so according to a priority. Although I have not discussed it, another issue you will need to deal with in your principalship is effective time management. You will find numerous books and experts available for you to consult in this area, but really, time management means nothing more than making a decision about what must be attended to first. As a result, if you plan to attack several issues throughout the school year, begin here in your management of your time by asking, "What comes first?" After you decide the answer to that question, you may also want to identify specific strategies for carrying out your many duties according to a reasonable schedule. For example, if you plan to spend as much time in teachers' classrooms as possible during the year, it may be more helpful to be specific and say that you plan to visit each teacher's class at least one time each semester.

Before the Year Begins

After the School Year Is Underway

In Preparation for the End of the Year

In closing, remember that no matter how well you may plan your year, you will encounter surprises and unplanned events, or you may discover some responsibilities for which you do not feel well prepared. In those cases, please remember that you will never be able to stand totally alone and be effective. Call other principals, seek advice from the central office, and gather input from your teachers, secretarial and custodial staff, parents, and others. After all, you can get a lot more accomplished when you work as a team.

5

Learning to Lead by Assisting

STEPHANIE SHINKUNAS had been a teacher in the Amber City Schools for 8 years when she decided to enroll in the master's degree and administrator certification program at Central Tech University. After 2 years of part-time study and what seemed like about a million miles of driving between her home, school, and the university, Stephanie finally completed her degree. A few weeks later, she passed the state administrators' licensing exam. Last March, she was ready to start looking for her first job as a school administrator.

Stephanie was really pleased to be offered what she considered an almost perfect first job. The Amber City Schools offered her the position of assistant principal at Clarence Crenshaw Middle School, one of the newer buildings in the district, which was only about a mile from Stephanie's home. She knew the neighborhood, many of the families associated with the school, and quite a few of the students. More important, she was going to be working with Dr. Carol Spencer, one of the most respected principals in the school district. Carol had a reputation for being very demanding with her assistants, but every one of them had landed as principals after only a few years of work with her. She definitely appeared to be the kind of mentor that Stephanie wanted in her first position.

True to form, the first few meetings between the principal and her new assistant were very formal. Carol spent about 30 minutes on each of three occasions outlining very specifically what she expected of Stephanie. She noted everything from how she expected her assistants to be dressed, how they were to behave when interacting with teachers, to even what time she expected Stephanie to arrive at the school each morning. They also carefully reviewed the district job description for assistant principals, line by line. Carol emphasized that Stephanie would be called upon to do everything the district required, and there would be many times when the catchall phrase "and all other duties assigned by the principal" would be exercised. Although she was a bit overwhelmed at first, Stephanie was still eager to learn by working next to an expert principal.

As the year progressed, however, Stephanie became increasingly frustrated in her new job. For one thing, she felt as if she were little more than Carol's gofer on many days. Often, she thought she was being set up by having to stay in her office for most days while Carol left the building to attend principals' meetings. She spent a lot of time greeting parents who wanted to know about Crenshaw's programs. She had hoped that she could do a lot of other things that were much more enjoyable than simply handling the walk-in parents who often came to the office to drop off forgotten books for their children, ask questions about school activities, or complain about teachers or school board policies. In addition, Stephanie quickly realized that Carol was doing a number of things that she did not agree with. As a person out of the classroom for only a few months, Stephanie often felt that she was more comfortable in the teachers' lounge than she was in the administrative offices with Carol.

"I don't think this is going to work out. I'll never become a principal of my own school at this rate," Stephanie confided to Charlie Fox. Charlie, now the director of pupil services for Amber City, had been a well-respected assistant principal and principal for several years before taking his current central office job. He also had become a mentor to several of the beginning administrators in the district, including Stephanie, who had once been one of Charlie's teachers.

"So you don't like having to do all the junk work while Carol gets the glamour duty. Is that what's bothering you?" Stephanie didn't really want to admit it, but Charlie had really captured what she was thinking. "Learn now how to do the little things. They'll become bigger later. And while I'm on my soapbox, don't fall to the temptation of siding with the teachers or anyone else to undercut your boss. Remember, you're an assistant principal." Stephanie really didn't like it, but because she respected Charlie, she decided to follow his advice for the remainder of at least this first year.

* * *

If you're a high school, middle school, or junior high school principal, chances are very good that you got to where you are now by serving as an assistant principal for a few years. If you're an elementary school principal, you may not have worked as an assistant. That may be quite unfortunate. Serving as an assistant principal, although typically not a glamorous or prestigious job in many school systems, might be one of the most powerful learning experiences you can have as you prepare to become an effective principal. The issue focused on in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this book is squarely on ways in which you can develop greater confidence and competence in the performance of technical duties attached to the role of the principal. Serving as an assistant for a few years can be an extremely powerful way to become better prepared to do the next job you wish to attain in education.

In this chapter, some practical tips are offered to you or anyone else who might now be serving in the role of assistant principal with an eye toward taking a principalship in the future.

Remember Your Role

The role of the assistant principal can be a very difficult one to carry out effectively. On the one hand, you are no longer a classroom teacher. Presumably, you made a deliberate choice to move into a career in school administration. That is why you enrolled in graduate courses at a university or participated in some similar form of management training. You probably spent a lot of time and money pursuing your goal as an educational leader. In most states, you had to go through the same preservice preparation required of principals. You may know colleagues who were able to go directly from the classroom into the principal's office.

On the other hand, if you are an assistant principal, you are clearly not in the inner circle of being a principal. You are no longer a teacher, but when principals' meetings are held, you are typically the person who has to stay at your school and run the building when the principal is out of the building. In this case, you will be defining yourself largely as an "assistant to the principal." On the other hand, you may see the assistant principalship as a regular and desirable step in the long-term process of becoming a principal. You must serve as an assistant but, at the same time, use your time wisely to cultivate the skills that can eventually be put to use when you have your own building.

Using the Role for Your Future

You may wish to remember several things if your goal is to move into a principalship after serving as an assistant. Some suggestions follow.

Cool Your Ego

No doubt, you are a bright, capable, energetic, and obviously ambitious educator. Suddenly, you are an assistant principal, and now you find yourself in a job in which you get some of the worst and dirtiest duties imaginable as an administrator. You are the person who listens to complaints. You deal with most of the student discipline problems in your school. Often, you are the person who is assigned the task of contacting parents about problems with their child's behavior, attendance, test scores, or many other issues that are really often quite unpleasant. While you do these kinds of things, your principal gets to stand in front of everyone and take credit for all the good things that happen in your school—even though you, the teachers, and the staff did all the work. But the boss gets all the credit and praise.

Probably no current or former assistant principal has not at least once had thoughts quite similar to those stated above. In some ways, the feelings might be exaggerated. In other cases, however, the scenario painted in the previous paragraph might be completely accurate: You do the work while someone else gets the credit.

This is when the temptation to begin feeling like a victim, or feeling sorry for yourself, is something that really needs to be avoided. The position that you hold is that of assistant principal. You are not the coprincipal of your school. Although this obvious statement may shock you at first, remember that you were not hired to be the lead administrator. Rather, your job is defined pretty carefully as a person who will assist the lead administrator. This means, perhaps more than anything else, that you need to rein in your understandable pride and ego. Again, you were hired because you demonstrated more leadership and managerial skills than others who applied for your position —didn't you?

The fact is that you were most likely hired because you appeared to have the potential of adding your skills to what is already present in your school. In short, you were probably selected, at least to some degree, because people assumed you could work effectively with the principal.

In the space below, indicate some ways in which you might face some potential conflicts between your own needs to be recognized and the needs of your principal.

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Indicate some of the ways in which you might work to resolve these potential conflicts between your principal and your ego.

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Assist the Principal

Your job, quite frankly, is to assist your principal. One of the most important ways of providing that support is by making the principal look good and achieve success. What that means, again, is that you have to learn how to live with the fact that you will have to suppress what is a natural desire to call attention to your own abilities and accomplishments and remain in the shadows.

A couple of things may happen. If you are fortunate to be working with an extremely capable and effective principal, he or she will no doubt recognize that you have been quietly and patiently sitting in the wings. For the most part, appreciation may not be shown immediately or even extremely visibly. But a good principal is more than likely to be able to discern competence and a job well done. In the majority of cases, remember that your good principal was probably a very good assistant principal at one time.

On the other hand, you may be assisting a person who is less than effective. In short, you may be working with the worst principal in the district. Continue to support your principal and do everything you can to make her or him look good. It's frustrating and it's hard work, but remember two things. First, if you do a good job of covering for an ineffective principal, you will do what can be done to help your school—teachers and, most critically, students. Second, if you are able to discern the ineffectiveness of your principal, it's probably not a major secret unknown to other principals, the superintendents, central office, board members, and the community at large. If you do your job and make things work for your boss, people will quickly recognize who is doing the job.

On the other hand, if you take the attitude that because you're stuck with an ineffective principal, you don't have to work that hard, something else will likely happen. If you don't do the job that the principal should be doing, your school will likely look quite poor to those who look at its performance. You will be part of the ineffective administration at a failing school, and your career could easily suffer. Remember that, in many cases, you may not get the kudos that come the way of good things that happen in your school. However, you will likely be blamed for failures as quickly as your principal might. People paint with very broad brushes.

What are some of the ways in which you can increase your status by helping your principal succeed?

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Keep Your Mouth Shut

Whether you are blessed by working with a great principal or forced to work with someone less capable, remember that you owe your boss discretion and loyalty. A big part of those qualities is defined by learning not to bad-mouth your boss, gossip, leak information to others, or above all, disagree publicly with your principal. As a school administrator, you will have access to many things that must be kept confidential. By the same token, you will make your job and the job of your principal much more difficult by speaking about your boss behind his or her back. It will be a temptation—if you are drawn into conversations with teachers, other administrators, parents, or community members—to say things that might be taken as critical of the principal's work. The old saying that if others hear you speaking ill of someone, they will begin to wonder if you speak ill of them in their absence, is one worth thinking about.

You may find legitimate situations in which it will be necessary to disagree with something done by your principal. Two words of advice are offered. First, if you disagree with something, say it directly to the principal, not to half the teachers in your school. Second, say it behind closed doors. The best analogy here might be that disagreements between colleagues, as between spouses, should not be done "in front of the kids." To do so can easily encourage those who seek opportunities for dissension to divide and conquer. No one is asking that you park your brain on the curb outside your school each day. You need not become a yes person who defers to the wishes of your principal at all times. However, when you disagree with something that your boss says or does, you have a professional responsibility to decide if it is of such consequence that you must bring it up, and if you do, to remain discrete and courteous by discussing it in private.

Remember that the business of operating a school is one that should be guided primarily by engaging in activities that are directly related to the learning needs of students. Having a situation in which a disagreement occurs between members of the management or leadership team causes turmoil in a school. It disrupts faculty morale and is anything but a good situation for anyone. For the students in a school in which such situations exist, it is like having constant bickering between parents in an unhappy home.

If you were to spend time with your principal (in a private session) and discuss some of the ways in which you might disagree with some of the things that he or she has asked you do, what might they be?

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Now that you have listed these things, it is up to you to decide if it is wise to share these concerns with the person with whom you now work.

Listen, Listen . . . Then Listen Some More

The great advantage of adopting a stance in which you keep your mouth shut and cool your ego is that you are likely to learn a lot of things very quickly. You can do this through a very simple learning technique you have no doubt shared with hundreds of students enrolled in your classes over the years. That technique is simply to listen and absorb.

One of the realities of being an assistant principal in your first formal job in school administration is that people likely realize that you do not have a great deal of prior managerial experience. Although you may get into situations in which you feel as if you must act and take a strong stance because, after all, you are now an administrator, keep in mind the old saying that, at times, good decisions are often those not made—at least immediately.

A constant temptation for those who are new to administration is to demonstrate their skills and strengths by taking immediate, decisive action on everything that comes across their desk. It's almost as if an unwritten set of instructions exists that says, "You are weak if you put off any decision." It is true that many in your organization will push you for a quick answer for every issue. And those same people will be your strongest allies—if you consistently decide issues to their liking. It is remarkable how "good" administrators frequently become very "bad" overnight, based on the strength of making only one contrary decision!

I am not suggesting that not making any decisions is good practice. Too often, schools suffer from a type of organizational paralysis that comes from decision avoidance by superintendents, school boards, principals, or others. But absolute, unyielding, and often rash decisions are equally unproductive, too. Two things are useful to remember to help you decide the proper balance between paralysis and authoritarianism.

First, as an assistant principal, you have not only the opportunity but the duty to defer many of your most challenging decisions to a higher authority, namely your principal.

That leads to the second recommendation for learning about effective decision making by listening. One of the reasons your principal has the job he or she does is normally because of greater experience as an administrator. That probably means that even when you don't necessarily agree with some stances taken by your boss, it is likely that they have a foundation in past practice. And the only way you are likely to achieve that same degree of experience is by remaining open to the thoughts of others and listening. And observing. And asking questions so you can listen some more. The key here is to adopt an attitude of willingness to learn by absorbing as much as possible.

Of course, the idea of listening as much as possible needs to be tempered a bit by your need to learn as you absorb what others do. I am not suggesting that you should never question the reasons and assumptions made by your principal. In fact, asking the question "Why did you take such and such a stance?" from time to time may be helpful to you and also the principal. Too often, experienced administrators make so many decisions on the basis of past experience that they almost lose track of why they are doing what they do. In some cases, a periodic "Why?" from a colleague can be an important tool to promote greater reflection and more effective performance.

List some of the ways in which you have already learned more about being an effective leader by listening and absorbing from more experienced colleagues with whom you now work.

Ask to Do More

A common problem for those who serve as assistant principals is that they often get typecast in their roles. If your first administrative post is serving as the "Assistant Principal for Discipline and Attendance" and you do a great job, you may have a problem. Forevermore, you may develop a well-deserved reputation as an outstanding disciplinarian. That is certainly not a negative statement. On the other hand, if your goal is to eventually move into a principalship of your own, being locked in as a disciplinarian—and nothing else—is likely to prevent others from seeing all the other things that you can do. Providing fair and effective student discipline is important, but a good principal (and good principal candidates) need to do much more. Financial management and budgeting, staff development, community relations, instructional improvement, and so many other responsibilities make up the life of a modern principal. If school districts do not perceive that you have skills and experience in these other areas of administration, you may be an assistant principal for quite some time.

It is absolutely essential, therefore, that you work to develop skills and expertise in as many areas of campus management as you can while you serve as an assistant principal. If you are the only assistant in a school, it may be somewhat easier to gain experience in a fairly wide range of areas of service. On the other hand, if you are part of a larger team of assistant principals and your colleagues have already been assigned specific areas of coverage (curriculum, student activities, community relations, and so on), your task of broadening your portfolio becomes much more complex. Remember that it is likely that some, if not all, of your colleagues have become comfortable with the areas in which they work. Not everyone necessarily wants to diversify in the way you might. But you will need to increase your personal awareness of issues and concerns encountered in many different functional areas of operating a school.

How can this happen? The first step should probably involve a frank conversation with your principal. Even though you have been hired essentially to do the job of assisting a principal, it is not likely to surprise your boss that you have ambitions and that some day you will want your own school. Explain what may be quite obvious: You need to gain insights into many different areas of school management and leadership.

Talking to your principal about trying to find ways of involving you in different administrative responsibilities may not pay off. After all, it may be that you are the only assistant in the school and the principal prefers to do certain things (e.g., curriculum and staff development). It is unlikely that you will be able to "diversify" in your present school. If that is the case, you may need to think about seeking a transfer to a different assignment. Many might question the wisdom of this advice. Traditionally, there has been a view that lateral transfers are negative; don't go somewhere else to do the same job. But in this case, the suggestion may be to seek a similar job title but with different responsibilities.

Stay Alive Professionally

If you are now an assistant principal, you will no doubt find amusing the observation that you are very busy with your job. Simply keeping your head above water and handling all the duties of your job is quite a task. But if you want to be a principal in the foreseeable future, you may need to do even more. For example, you cannot neglect the need to stay tuned to professional issues, recent research, and other developments in the field of education and educational research. To state the obvious, pursuing a personal professional development agenda is not always consistent with the time demands of serving as a school administrator, particularly the assistant principal, who is so often at the mercy of "all other duties assigned."

Despite the limitations of time (and energy), two areas are recommended for personal growth while you strive to refine your leadership skills. One is through reading and the other is by participating in professional seminars, meetings, and conferences.

Engaging in a reading agenda is a relatively simple activity, although going home to read a book after a hard day at a school in which you serve as an assistant principal is not something you would necessarily put high on your personal priority list. However, if you are going to keep current in professional practice trends, the single best way to do so is to keep up with recent literature, either in the form of journal articles or with selected books. You cannot possibly become an expert on everything presented in the educational literature, but you may deliberately carve out an area in which you do most of your reading. For example, some school administrators read almost exclusively the works of William Glasser and his vision of the "Quality School." Others follow the writing and research of Carl Glickman and his work on "Developmental Supervision." Neither of these authors will ever write about every single topic that needs to be addressed by effective administrators. But Glasser, Glickman, and many other serious educational writers offer broad visions of effective schooling that are worthy of review, reflection, and perhaps adoption. The key here is that I am not suggesting any single author or series of work but rather encouraging you to keep your mind alive and well so that it can be used as a valuable resource of knowledge to improve both present and future administrative practice.

In the space below, indicate any recent books or other material you have read (or plan to read in the near future). Indicate what appeals to you about being an assistant principal.

The second recommended practice to help assistant principals remain alive professionally involves participation in seminars and conferences. To a large extent, your ability to follow through with this suggestion is dependent on available resources and the goodwill and permission of your principal. Simply stated, conferences cost money and time away from your job. On the other hand, even if it might mean using your own finances and spending vacation periods, personal days, or weekends to attend professional meetings, think about doing so for at least two reasons. First, you are likely to learn some important things about topics that may be important to your work both now and in the future. Second, attending professional meetings will put you in contact with many other people who will, in turn, get to know you and your abilities. That form of self-marketing through personal networks will have considerable value when you begin looking around for a principalship some day.

Indicate any professional conferences, meetings, or seminars in which you have recently participated. Indicate some of the benefits you believe you have acquired through your involvement.

What professional events would you like to attend during the next year or two? Why?

Later, in Chapter 11, I will offer many additional suggestions for professional development. The critical thing to be remembered, regardless of what approaches you may follow, is that if your goal is to grow into a principalship some day, then you need to continue to grow professionally.

Stay Positive

The last recommendation offered to you as an assistant principal may be the single most powerful one, because it touches on all the other items listed. Be as positive and enthusiastic as you can about yourself, your job, your colleagues, your students, and your school district. This is not always an easy thing to do, of course. As an administrator, a big part of your life automatically involves being knee deep in alligators. It is more than a little tempting to spend a lot of time feeling bad about your job as an assistant principal. After all, since you might do a lot of disciplinary work, you see a lot of students who are in trouble. At least in part as a result of that, you encounter many parents who are not happy. Because you work as an assistant, you often get many less than glamorous jobs to do for your boss. And as an insider, you often get to see and understand many of the biggest problems faced by your district. In short, it's easy to become cynical and begin looking only at the worst features of life as an educator.

Now, stop and think about what dwelling on the problems might do for you as you begin to build your career as a leader. Imagine that you are involved with searching for a new principal of a school. Also, think what reaction you would likely have to an applicant for that position if he or she spent a good deal of time criticizing or complaining about their present school or district. Compare your impressions of that person with someone who had a reputation for being positive, enthusiastic, and a booster for their present situation. Given those two alternatives as applicants, if equally qualified for the principalship, most (if not all) school systems will select the person who is positive.

Building an image as someone who is enthusiastic and happy cannot take place only during the few weeks in which you might be an active candidate for a job, of course. A reputation as a team player who can make a positive contribution as a principal gets built over a long period of time and as a result of many things. One of the critical things that you need to remember is that you are on stage during your entire career. Whether you know it or not, people are looking at you as a potential candidate for future positions. As soon as it is clear that a principal of a school is retiring, being transferred, or leaving for whatever reason, people begin to think of possible candidates as replacements. You want to be on that list. The way to do that is to be visible and perceived as a person who would be a positive addition to a school.

When you are at meetings with people from other schools, it is critical that you be a cheerleader for your present principal, school, and district. No matter what others may say or believe about your current situation, it is critical that your public stance be one of support and commitment to the best place you can possibly be—at least for now. Taking any other stance creates an image that you do not want. You do not want anyone to fear what you might do or say about their school if you become their principal. If you are to be the leader of "our school," people want to believe that you will support them as much as you do in your present position.

Regardless of any problems that might exist in your present school or district, list 10 or more features of your present situation that make it a good place to work.

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Make a copy of your list and read it over each time you head out your door. Do not do a similar listing of problems and shortcomings. Frankly, even if saying these things wouldn't have a negative effect on your career, no one really wants to hear your gripes or problems you are having back home.

Stay positive, be enthusiastic, and project an image that allows people to have confidence that you will be the same kind of person in your next job.

Your Personal Plan

If you are currently an assistant principal who wishes to become a principal in the near future, review the suggested learning strategies presented in this chapter. Identify those issues that you believe are most relevant to you, and indicate what you plan to do during the next year or two. For example, you might wish to identify a few books that you would like to read as a way to stay alive professionally.

If you are not currently an administrator, but you are planning to begin your administrative career as an assistant principal, you may wish to identify which of the listed strategies are issues that you plan to address so that service as an assistant principal can be a powerful approach to your formation as an educational leader.

II

SOCIALIZATION

PART II FOCUSES on helping you understand ways in which you may feel more comfortable about your new role as a school principal. As noted earlier, newcomers often have a difficult time fitting in at a new school, district, and above all, profession. Among the most important lessons that are presented here are such things as developing an awareness of what other people will expect of you and how you might work toward becoming more a part of the school in which you now work and its surrounding community.

6

Others' Expectations

When Frank Lujan accepted his current position as the principal of Graystone Elementary School, he felt a mixture of both confidence and anxiety to an extent he had never quite felt before in his professional life. He believed that he had enough experiences as a teacher to appreciate some of the major issues that needed to be addressed in an effective elementary school. He also had learned enough in the traditional task areas of law, finance, supervision, and personnel when he completed his graduate work at State University.

On the other hand, Frank was not totally comfortable with the expectations that others had for his performance. He knew that he wanted to spend a lot of time working with teachers to assist them in improving their efforts to help the kids. That seemed to be a statement that made a lot of sense to those who talked with him during the three interviews that preceded his getting this job. However, last week, when the superintendent met with the new principals, Frank heard a somewhat different message about getting the year off to a good start by taking charge of things through sharing personal visions and goals with the teachers and staff. Back at State University, Frank's mentor and adviser, Dr. Norma Galloway, always told him that his most critical job as a beginning principal was to make certain that "the chalk was in the classrooms and the light bulbs were illuminating the thinking in the school." That was Dr. Galloway's approach to letting Frank know that he had to make certain that the technical and managerial details of the principal's job were very important.

Frank was truly looking forward to his new life as a school principal, but in fact, he was more than a bit confused about whose voice he should be hearing now that the school year was about to get underway.

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Frank Lujan is not the only beginning principal who has been given so much good advice that he did not get any good advice at all. The fact is, just about everyone has a different idea about what you should be doing now that you are in charge. In the long run, you will have to make your own decisions as to what should be done and how you should define your job as a principal. But it is critical to note that there are likely to be numerous competing definitions and descriptions of that job.

This chapter tackles the issue of these competing expectations. Research findings are presented about what different individuals such as superintendents, experienced principals, and aspiring principals have to say about the most important aspects of your job. In the long run, you will have to be the person who decides what is most critical about your work, but some alternative perspectives that may be of interest to you are also shared.

Critical Skills for Beginning Principals: A Survey

Before going any further with this discussion of the kinds of skills that different groups expect of you as a beginning principal, you may wish to take a moment to respond to the items on the survey in Figure 6.1, the Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory. This instrument was developed a few years ago to do the research that serves as the basis for this chapter.

Scale 1 (Items 1-8) deals with the items that are associated with the technical and managerial duties of principals. These tend to be the kinds of job responsibilities that are found in job descriptions or policy manuals of school districts. Scale 2 (Items 9-16) deals with issues that are defined as socialization skills, or things that a person needs to know, do, or demonstrate to fit into a new organization. Finally, Scale 3 (Items 17-24) is composed of items that are self-awareness skills, or items that touch on one's personal ability to know one's own values, attitudes, and beliefs as they are related to a professional role.

Now that you've had a chance to complete the Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory yourself, you have rank-ordered the three broad categories of technical and managerial skills (Scale 1), socialization skills (Scale 2), and self-awareness skills (Scale 3). The next section of this chapter looks at your ratings as they compare with those of other individuals who also participated in this research over the past few years. You will soon appreciate the fact that even among professional school administrators, there is little absolute consensus as to the "ideal" duties of principals.

Figure 6.1. Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory

Directions: For each of the following duties assigned to principals, please assess the extent to which each item is critical to your ability to do your job. Use the following scale in responding to each item:

5 = *Extremely important*
4 = *Somewhat important*
3 = *Neutral* (not extremely important or totally unimportant)
2 = *Somewhat unimportant*
1 = *Totally unimportant*

Scale (Circle One)	*Item*
5 4 3 2 1	1. How to evaluate staff (i.e., procedures for the task and also the substance: What do standards really mean?)
5 4 3 2 1	2. How to facilitate/conduct group meetings
5 4 3 2 1	3. How to design and implement a data-based improvement process, including goal-setting and evaluation
5 4 3 2 1	4. How to develop and monitor a building budget
5 4 3 2 1	5. How to organize and conduct parent-teacher-student conferences
5 4 3 2 1	6. How to establish a scheduling program (master schedule) for students and staff
5 4 3 2 1	7. Awareness of issues related to local school law
5 4 3 2 1	8. How to manage food service, custodial, and secretarial staff
5 4 3 2 1	9. Establishing a positive and cooperative relationship with other district administrators
5 4 3 2 1	10. How to determine who is what in a school setting
5 4 3 2 1	11. Knowing how to relate to school board members and central office personnel
5 4 3 2 1	12. Knowing where the limits exist with the district or building and balancing that knowledge with one's own professional values
5 4 3 2 1	13. Understanding how the principalship changes family and other personal relationships
5 4 3 2 1	14. Developing interpersonal networking skills that may be used with individuals inside and outside the system

Figure 6.1. Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory (Continued)

Scale (Circle One)	*Item*
5 4 3 2 1	15. Ability to encourage involvement by all parties in the educational system
5 4 3 2 1	16. How to develop positive relationships with other organizations and agencies located in the school's surrounding community
5 4 3 2 1	17. Demonstrating an awareness of what it means to possess organizational power and authority
5 4 3 2 1	18. Demonstrating an awareness of why one was selected for the leadership position in the first place
5 4 3 2 1	19. Portraying a sense of self-confidence on the job
5 4 3 2 1	20. Having a vision along with the understanding needed to achieve organizational goals
5 4 3 2 1	21. Demonstrating a desire to make a significant difference in the lives of students
5 4 3 2 1	22. Being aware of one's biases, strengths, and weaknesses
5 4 3 2 1	23. Understanding and seeing that change is ongoing and that it results in a continually changing vision of the principalship
5 4 3 2 1	24. How to assess job responsibilities in terms of the real role of the principal

Scoring: Now add up your scores in the following ways:

Scale 1: Items 1-8 = ______ divided by 8 = ________

Scale 2: Items 9-16 = ______ divided by 8 = ________

Scale 3: Items 17-24 = ______ divided by 8 = ________

Rank-order your three average scores per scale:

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Other Beginners

If you rank-ordered the three skill areas from most to least important, as follows:

1. Technical and managerial skills
2. Socialization skills
3. Self-awareness skills

You were in line with the majority of other beginners (i.e., principals in their first, second, or third years on the job) who also participated in this research. In addition, you were consistent with a high percentage of aspiring principals (people currently enrolled in university preservice preparation programs leading to state certification or licensure).

Of all 24 items on the survey, which one did you believe to be the single most important item?

Which was the least important item?

Research has found that people who were enrolled in training programs leading to certification as principals or beginning principals related Item 7, "Awareness of issues related to local school law," as the most critical skill to be demonstrated by principals, whereas Item 17, "Demonstrating an awareness of what it means to possess organizational power and authority," was viewed as the least important skill.

What might these responses imply to you in terms of the perceptions held by colleagues who are not yet in the principalship or who have also recently stepped into their first administrative assignment?

Experienced Principals

Of the 24 items on the Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory, which do you believe were rated as most important by principals with at least three years of experience?

Which items from the survey were probably rated as least important by the principals, in your mind?

According to the principals who responded to this research, the most critical skill to be demonstrated by a beginning principal was Item 10, "How to determine who is what in a school setting." This item was followed closely by Item 9, "Establishing a positive and cooperative relationship with other district administrators." Both of these items were in the cluster related to socialization skills.

According to practicing principals, the least relevant items that need to be demonstrated by beginning colleagues were Item 8, "How to manage food service, custodial, and secretarial staff," and Item 6, "How to establish a scheduling program (master schedule) for students and staff." These items, and most others that were among the lowest-ranked issues, were clustered in the technical and managerial skills category.

What are some of the reasons you believe that experienced principals might rank these items as they do?

Superintendents

The last group of educators that responded to this survey were superintendents who had hired new principals in their school districts during the last 3 years. Their reasons followed very different patterns from those of beginning and experienced principals. What items do you believe superintendents viewed as most critical for beginning principals?

What do superintendents view as the least important skills that need to be exhibited by beginning school administrators?

Of all the skills listed in the Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory, the one indicated as most important by superintendents who had experience with hiring and working with new principals in recent years was Item 18, "Demonstrating an awareness of why one was selected for a leadership position in the first place." Second on the list of priorities valued by superintendents was Item 19, "Portraying a sense of self-confidence on the job."

The lowest items on the superintendents' list were Item 8, "How to manage food service, custodial, and secretarial staff," and Item 6, "How to establish a scheduling program (master schedule) for students and staff."

In terms of the broad categories of skills measured by the survey, Table 6.1 shows how the priorities of the three groups surveyed look when compared.

So What Does This Mean?

The fact that three different groups hold different expectations for what principals are supposed to do is not a new or astonishing finding. However, the study reported here has provided some important insights into differences that, in turn, are related to

TABLE 6.1 Skills Priority Comparison for School Administrators

	Beginning Principals' Ranking	*Practicing Principals' Ranking*	*Superintendents' Ranking*
Technical and Managerial Skills	1	3	2
Socialization Skills	2	1	2
Self-Awareness Skills	3	2	1

finding more effective ways of guiding people through personal career transitions and also providing people with more effective experiences as beginning school principals.

The implications of this research on perceptions related to critical skills for beginning school principals are clear in the area of induction programs designed to assist novice school administrators. For example, the findings of this study suggest that experienced principals and superintendents value colleagues' abilities to demonstrate greater self-confidence and the ability to fit into the social context of the school district. This offers a great argument in favor of adopting mentoring schemes for new principals. Chapter 11 will review this topic in greater detail. Here, it should be noted that mentoring for new principals is often missing the mark about the real issues facing beginners. The majority of existing mentoring programs tend to focus on helping people learn critical technical and managerial skills associated with work in a particular school system. I am not suggesting that such skills are unimportant or that beginners always have an immediate grasp of how to do a number of specific things. On the other hand, it may be considerably more important for a district wanting to support novice principals to invest scarce professional development resources in a program addressing issues that typically could be handled by assigning experienced secretaries to beginners or by inviting people to call the central office with any questions about local operating procedures. Then, too, when people take their first principalships after a few years of serving as assistants, they often have a fairly strong repertoire of managerial skills acquired while working with one or more experienced principals. What even very seasoned assistants do not know is how it feels to be in the top administrative position in a school.

Mentoring for beginning principals is a desirable practice. However, such a practice works best if it is directed largely at supporting first-year administrators in their efforts to increase their skill levels in the areas of increased socialization and self-awareness to the job and to a new system. Such mentoring ideally focuses on the need and feelings of the individual as he or she proceeds during the first year or two of service as an administrator.

The establishment of mentoring relationships will not automatically guide you through a successful first year. Having a mentor will certainly help, but you can do things as an individual as well. Understanding that different groups of people have different expectations of what you are supposed to do is extremely important. At this point in your career, you probably believe that the most critical tasks for principals to perform are to take care of the technical and managerial side of the job—maintain the budget and schedule, keep within the law, and so on. These are certainly important things for any principal to do.

However, it is also important to note that your colleagues will expect other behaviors. Other principals in your district want good colleagues—people who fit in with them and contribute to the well-being of the school district in general. Superintendents want people who are confident—who believe that they can do the job for which they were hired. The research findings suggest that you will not be viewed by others as very successful if you spend all your time taking care of business in your school. Others expect that you can do the job according to the district's published job description. They want you to add your own personality and ability to the quality of life in your new home. That may be one of the reasons why a lot of beginning principals are shocked to find out that they are not evaluated highly by their own school systems, even when they have spent a lot of time in their own buildings doing the job they believe they were hired to do.

One additional word of explanation and, perhaps, caution. Although the research found that various groups look differently at the relative importance of skills that need to be demonstrated by beginning principals, no individual items or categories of skills (technical and managerial, socialization, or self-awareness) are totally unimportant. Every item on the survey was viewed as critical. However, when faced with a need to prioritize, different groups find certain items more important than others. Although the information presented here is meant to guide you and give you some notion of how others might look at your job, in large measure, how you personally view your job and its various responsibilities and tasks must be a matter for you to define on your own. Once again, it is critical to understand and remain consistent with your own personal and professional platform as a way to guide your decisions in this area. More information is provided regarding this important activity in Chapter 8.

Your Personal Plan

This chapter concludes by asking you to incorporate the concepts learned in this chapter into your personal professional portfolio as a way to guide your growth as a principal. Now that you have had the opportunity to think about the kinds of skills you value, as seen by your responses to the Beginning Principal's Critical Skills Inventory and compared with the perceptions of others, where do you believe is the greatest degree of difference between what you value and what experienced principals and superintendents value?

In what areas do you find the greatest similarities and overlaps between your assumptions about critical skills and the assumptions of experienced principals and superintendents?

In the space below, note some of the ways in which you plan to address the differences that exist between your perceptions of critical skills and the perceptions of your colleagues.

7

Learning Your School's Culture

Michael Dandridge was extremely excited on this, his first day as the new principal of Rhinegold Middle School. Although he had 3 years of experience as a junior high school assistant principal in a nearby community, he had always looked forward to the day when he would have his own building. He had always wanted to step into a setting where he would have the chance to implement some of the ideas he had for more effective ways to help early adolescents. Michael had been very successful as a middle school teacher for several years. He enjoyed a reputation as a very innovative teacher. It was not surprising that he now saw a chance of carrying out a lot of his dreams through his new role as the leader of a school. He would be the instructional leader of Rhinegold.

Michael was thinking of the things he wanted to do to change the school's curriculum and instructional practices as he walked into his office for the first time in July. Of course, he had been in the school before, when he came for the interview and also when the superintendent took him for a walk-through the day before the school board approved his appointment. On both occasions, he looked, but he really didn't see much. He had been so excited about the things he planned to do as the new principal that now he really couldn't recall many of the details of his new school's physical environment. It was a bit like the experience that he and his wife had many years ago when they bought their first home. A few hours after they signed an offer to buy the house, they knew very little about the details of what they had just purchased. All they knew was that it was their home, and they were happy. Ill-fitting closet doors and cracks on the basement floor were hidden by their immediate enthusiasm.

Michael looked around his new office at Rhinegold and noticed that it was a large enough room with a nice pair of windows that looked out onto the playground. He also realized that the room was extremely hot a fact that he didn't recognize when he came through the building last spring when it was still rather cold outside or when the superintendent took him through the building late last Tuesday evening. An air conditioner had been installed by the last principal, but Michael didn't plan to use it much. He really didn't mind the heat. After all, he didn't plan to spend that much time in his office anyway. And besides that, this was his school!

Michael also noted two additional features of his office that he hadn't paid much attention to before taking the keys. First, a large bookcase covered one wall. It was filled with books and manuals left by the previous principal, who hadn't been back to collect all his personal belongings since he transferred to another middle school in the district. Michael looked at the titles of the materials left on the shelves. In addition to the expected items such as the district policy manual and the district curriculum guides, all the other reading material dealt with either classroom management techniques or approaches to student discipline.

What concerned Michael even more were two study carrels that faced another wall in his office. When he asked the secretary why they were being stored in his office, she smiled and said they weren't being stored there; they were part of the furnishings that had been there as long as the previous principal had been at Rhinegold. These study carrels were used in the in-school suspension program. The principal personally supervised students placed on ISS, as it was called in this district.

Michael made a mental note to box up the books and call the former principal that afternoon. He had the custodians move the carrels out into the hallway so they could be taken to the central office warehouse for storage. Michael didn't plan on being the in-school suspension monitor. He was going to be an instructional leader, not a cop!

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Start out by describing the principal of Rhinegold before Michael Dandridge came on board.

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Some of the descriptions that emerge about Michael's predecessor include "strict," "attentive to discipline," "unwillingness to go out of his office very much," and even "uninvolved with instructional practices." These might be unfair generalizations concerning a person's entire professional career or presence in a particular school. However, the carrels for student discipline, the nature of the books, and the fact that the principal's office was air-conditioned contribute to an image of what the former building administrator did. It doesn't mean that what took place in the past was necessarily bad. The fact that the previous principal was at Rhinegold for several years probably means that the way he approached his job was viewed by many as quite effective.

This points to an important issue that a new principal needs to address, namely how to reconcile his or her new ways of approaching the principalship with those of the last principal. It is important for the newcomer to ask, "What did the staff expect of the last principal?" as a way to understand what they now expect. In the case of Michael Dandridge at Rhinegold Middle School, what are likely to be some of the expectations that the staff has of a principal who steps in after the person who had carrels in his office?

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Once again, it is impossible to say absolutely what images the teachers at Rhinegold had of the role of the principal. But it looks like many people might have thought that the last person was good because he took care of the "bad boys and girls" so the teachers wouldn't be bothered by that type of problem. The former principal appears to not have spent much time out in the school, in teachers' classes, or otherwise relating to the staff. Instead, he stayed in his office and responded to the needs of his teachers by making certain that the school was calm, orderly, and well disciplined. Teachers could teach effectively because the principal took care of all the trouble. And the principal appeared comfortable in that role. After all, his professional library reflected a serious interest in learning about student discipline and behavior management.

Michael Dandridge may be in for quite a shock when his teachers return from their summer vacation and find the study carrels gone from the principal's office and the principal out in the halls, visiting classrooms and observing teachers. "How will the new guy be able to do what Mr. X used to do?" will be a frequent question heard in the faculty lounge. The next few weeks, or even months, will represent a very difficult transition period in which teachers will need to recognize that the old principal is gone and, more important, so is the old image of what a principal is supposed to do to help teachers. Michael could be in for a tough time if he does not appreciate these subtle but critical issues. I am not advocating the maintenance of the old system and image for no reason other than to make teachers comfortable. Quite the contrary; change is often needed, and the new principal has been hired largely to bring about that kind of change. But it is critical that a newcomer realize what existed in the past, who the heroes were, what are some of the shared war stories of the school, and then celebrate that history and move cautiously into the future.

Don't Just Look . . . See

The school you have just inherited has a lot of important signs that you need to be able to see if you are going to understand the culture, appreciate it, celebrate it, and then move on. Michael Dandridge could have been in for a terrible first year if he had looked at the book titles and study carrels and had not *seen* what they truly represented. On one hand, what was present was clutter and some other principal's books in a small office. Taking time to see might enable a principal like Michael to appreciate the culture, history, symbols, and in general, values and expectations of a community.

What did you know about the culture of the school where you now work prior to coming to work there for the first time? (Note: If you are working as the principal in which you formerly served as a teacher or in some other capacity, is your view of the school the same as what it was in the past? Why or why not?)

List some of the things you saw when you first came to your present school that impressed you as signs of "the way they do things around here."

What did you do in response to the things you saw?

Who were some of the heroes in your school? Why were they so important?

When a newcomer first arrives, it is critical that that person spend time looking very carefully at the whole environment to see what story is being told. It is also an important exercise for teachers who think they know their school but will have a new and different perspective if they return to their schools in a different role (i.e., as a principal). For example, did the former principal arrange his or her desk in a way that it served as a kind of barrier to people who came into the office? Are the classrooms reflective of a lot of informal teaching settings for small group discussions, or does it appear that the preferred mode of instruction centers around very formal, lecture-style classroom arrangements? If so, what might these signs suggest about the climate or feel of the school in which you now work? What do you see in the teachers' rooms? Is there evidence of a lot of kidding around or joking that seems to be part of how the teachers interact? If you see your office decorated with your predecessor's belongings, are there any examples of the teachers' relationships with "the boss?" For example, are there such things as gag gifts, cartoon clips, or memory books provided by the staff?

The critical issue here is that "a school is not a school is not . . . " Each building, regardless of size, location, level of students served, geographic site, and just about any other variable selected, has a completely different reality, history, and feel about it. Like individual people, schools have different personalities. Often, these personalities are easier to identify than one might assume. If the newcomer takes time to see the subtle signs of the system, rather than quickly looking things over, the true reality of a school will become apparent.

Don't forget, too, that you need to be able to identify what many call the informal organization of your school. This refers to the people and things that don't have formal titles but influence what goes on in your school each day. Informal leaders of your school, or key influentials, need to be recognized as soon as possible. Also, take time to learn about the subcultures in your school. Many people make a huge mistake by walking into a school and assuming that all teachers are one group, the secretaries are another group, and so on. Factions exist, and loyalties appear from one small group with another. For example, some of your teachers may be ardent supporters of the local teachers' association or union who went out on the picket lines during a recent strike. Other teachers may have been vehemently opposed to such activity. Some custodians may have sided with the strikers, whereas others did not.

Listen . . . Don't Just Hear

The importance of seeing a school and not simply looking at it is similar to taking time to listen to what is happening in a school. It is important to remain attentive to the sounds and language of your new environment. They provide many subtle indications of the climate and informal organization in which you now work.

Listen carefully to the words the teachers use to describe the students. Are they filled with warmth and support? Or do they express a constant battle between "us" and "them"? Do the war stories shared in the teachers' lounge reflect instances of adults controlling kids ("You should have seen how I got those kids to shape up last period!"), or are the stories shared about successes in achieving positive results ("My third period English class was really great this morning. You should have seen the presentations they made!")? Of course, most schools will have a mixture of both kinds of teacher talk. But in some schools, the prevailing philosophy of the teachers in relation to their work with students is visible and needs to be recognized (if not necessarily endorsed) by a new principal. One of the challenges that a principal may face involves changing staff attitudes toward children. But changes cannot take place on the first day, and ignoring past attitudes will not help the change process.

How would you describe the teacher talk about students and other issues in your school?

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Another important indicator of your new school is what you hear in your office as secretaries, aides, custodians, nurses, cafeteria workers, or other staff members make contact with parents, students, teachers, and members of the general public. Any new principal would do well to listen attentively to the tone of language (friendly and cordial, or too businesslike and cold?) that people use with individuals from outside the school. Have you ever called a business on the phone and then decided to go somewhere else simply because of the way you were addressed? People experience the same feelings when they call a school. If you knew nothing about your school other than the sound of your secretary's voice, what impressions would you have of your building?

Another thing that listening to subtle sounds in your school will tell you is the degree of formality that exists in the building in which you have recently become the principal. Do teachers call you by your first name immediately, or do they tend to refer to you more formally? How do they refer to each other? It is not surprising to hear teachers who have worked with each other for years to continue to use formal terms in addressing each other ("Mrs. Garcia," or "Mr. Jones"), at least during the course of the school day and particularly in big city schools. This may surprise you, but respect it. Some practices will never die; calling Mrs. Johnson "Sara" in front of her students may be offensive and may distance you and a teacher who might otherwise become one of your strongest allies.

Walk through the halls of your school and listen to the sounds you hear, the sounds coming out of teachers' classrooms. Is there a lot of good-natured laughing or a considerable amount of raised voices indicating that teachers are disciplining students? Or is it extremely quiet? Any of these signs may be indicative of the general tone of your school.

If a person who knew little about your school walked through the halls one day and listened, what kind of impressions would he or she take away?

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Celebrate the Past

A natural, unavoidable contradiction presents itself when a new principal walks into a school. On one hand, the new leader is expected to do something different, bring about change of some sort, and make some kind of difference. This is true whether the former principal was viewed as extremely positive or as ineffective. People expect a newcomer to represent a new order of things. On the other hand, schools are very fragile and normally very conservative organizations. "The way we've always done things" is a pretty strong force that people seek to maintain. Thus, the new principal might be criticized for not doing enough but also doing too much at the same time.

Consider the dilemma facing Michael Dandridge. He knew that the district hired him to serve as an instructional leader, but he noticed that his predecessor had been primarily an office-bound disciplinarian. If he didn't bring about change and assert himself in one way, he would get into trouble with the central office and school board. On the other hand, when he threw out the carrels and said he would no longer take on student discipline as his primary duty, his teachers were upset. What was he to do?

The fictional Michael Dandridge is patterned on a principal who now has nearly 10 years of experience at "Rhinegold Middle School," and is respected by his teachers and the central office as well. However, if someone could invent a magical instrument called a "retrospectoscope" to allow us to look backward, it would be possible to second-guess things that made his beginning as a principal more difficult than it needed to be.

Perhaps the most significant thing that Michael did that may have made his arrival at his new school a bit more troublesome was the fact that he did not talk to any of his new staff members about their perceptions of why the former principal did some of the things he did. Michael had the right to try to change the image of the principalship from one of chief disciplinarian to instructional leader. In fact, his efforts ought to be commended. But when he simply took steps to remove any sign of his predecessor from the school, he was symbolically denying something that many of his teachers probably did not feel comfortable about losing. Even if many of the teachers didn't like the former principal, Michael's actions seemed to suggest that the teachers and former principal were wrong. At the very least, it was important for Michael to share with several teachers what he planned to do. He could have assured them that he was not going to discredit the fine work of the past. Rather, he was simply trying to start things off with a different perspective of the new kid on the block.

Another thing that Michael could have done shortly after the beginning of the new school year was to invite the former principal to drop by to visit his old school and talk with Michael about some of his visions about Rhinegold. In addition, some discussions about the history, culture, and traditions of the school could help both the new and former principals develop additional insights regarding the school, teachers, and students.

Do you have any additional suggestions for how the shift from one principal to the next could have been made less traumatic?

It is critical that new principals not charge into their new settings so forcefully that they do not give honor to the past. Former staff members, practices, policies, and traditions might need to be replaced, but they need to be publicly respected, because they represent many subtle aspects of life in an organization. Any newly arrived administrator who does not celebrate the good work of the past will have many unnecessary battles with people who might see the newcomer as unfeeling or insensitive to the local culture. By the same token, remember that one of the things a new leader needs to do is assess the practices of the past and determine what was viewed negatively by parents, teachers, and others. Simply wanting to avoid the appearance of getting rid of all past practices does not mean that you must be bound to repeat undesirable work as well.

Developing an Action Plan

Describe the most important aspects of the school culture that you inherited as the new principal, that is, the kinds of things you must understand as you step in as the new leader.

Which elements of the past culture represent things you cannot comfortably live with as the new principal?

What practices appear to have been least popular with faculty, students, or parents?

How do you plan to step away from these past practices in a way that will not alienate you from your staff or other important people in your school environment?

How do you hope to replace the things you are not comfortable with in your new school? Why?

What are some of the features of your new school that you believe should be maintained as much as possible? Why?

III

SELF-AWARENESS

ALTHOUGH TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL skills and socialization are important issues to be dealt with by the beginning principal, self-awareness may be the single most crucial concern for those first stepping on board as administrators. The next chapters focus on some ways you may be able to relate your own values and perspectives to what it means to be a leader of a school.

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Reviewing Personal Values

BEGINNING PRINCIPALS experience difficulties during their first years on the job for many reasons. In some cases, they do not take care of business. For example, they might ignore the importance of completing assigned administrative tasks on time, or they might violate local policies or even state laws. Another reason for people getting into trouble is that they do not seem to have the kinds of people skills needed to communicate effectively with parents, staff, other administrators, or even students.

In this chapter, however, the focus is on yet another area found to be a serious problem for many beginning school principals. Research on beginning leadership problems identifies the importance of people coming to grips with their own set of personal values and priorities as they engage in the activities required of principals (self-awareness skills, as identified in Chapter 2).

This chapter suggests a strategy that might be used to identify important personal and professional values as a first step toward walking into the principal's office for the first time.

Case Study: Because It's Important to Me

Charles Davis, principal at Thomas Jefferson High School, was in trouble. He had just gotten a call from Moira Kingsley, assistant superintendent for administrative services. She pointed out to Charles that for the fourth month in a row, he was at least 1 week late in turning in his Building Use Report Plan (BURP) to the central office. According to Moira, this was an important form because it provided a good deal of information regarding the ways Thomas Jefferson and all the other high schools in the district were being used by community groups in the evenings and on weekends. This, in turn, could be used in the superintendent's monthly report to the community to show how responsive the schools were to public needs and interests. And with a bond election coming up in 6 months, it was critical for the district to talk to the voters.

Charles offered his apologies, again, to Moira and promised to get last month's report to her as soon as possible and this month's report to her on time. As soon as he hung up the phone, however, he looked at his calendar for the next 3 days and realized that it would be virtually impossible to find the time to fill in the report. The remainder of today was scheduled for classroom visitations. Charles had promised his teachers that he would be available to visit each teacher's classroom whenever the teacher felt he could be of assistance in that way. Furthermore, Anne Marie Burkowitz, the assistant principal, had made a similar commitment to being on call for supervisory assistance. The secretaries in Charles's office were overloaded with tons of work from the upcoming regional accreditation team visit. And both Charles and Anne Marie were going to be tied up the next 3 nights with different activities at the school. The boys' basketball game against archrival Woodrow Wilson was tonight, a wrestling match tomorrow night, and a parent advisory community meeting on the next night. Tomorrow's schedule was also filled with classroom observations, and Charles also knew that a certain percentage of his time would be devoted to responding to whatever momentary problems walked into his office each day.

Charles knew within a minute after talking to Moira that he would be hearing from her again in a few days. But he also knew that he was doing the best job he knew how to do, whether the central office recognized it or not.

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School principals make hundreds of decisions every day. Each is made through certain lenses that the individual brings to the job. And the sources of these lenses are varied. Some come from written school board policy manuals. For example, a principal quickly decides that a secretary is entitled to take next Friday off to go to the doctor, because the school district has a clear statement of what constitutes sick leave or personal leave. These are easy decisions to make in most cases. Principals are called upon to make other decisions each day that are not easily defined and are not readily made according to the policy of the system.

Consider, for example, decisions such as the one that Charles Davis had to make in the case described above. Charles had to decide whether or not he would comply with the requirements of the school system and fill out his monthly report or if he would use his time in other ways. What is the deciding factor? Charles's personal and professional values have a lot to do with his ultimate choice (and also the probable consequences resulting from his decisions). Charles Davis valued contact with his teachers and students more than he did a paper report form. No printed manual or other material guided his decision.

Most decisions made by principals are matters of personal choice. In many cases, the reasons principals use in making their decisions are unclear to the outside observer. Ms. Jones gets to take her class on a field trip, but Mr. Smith is not permitted to go. Bobby Wilson is given 3 days of in-school suspension, but Mary Pierce is simply reprimanded for the same offense and sent back to the classroom. Teachers complain about apparent inconsistencies in the visible behavior of the principal. Yet, principals often do not seem concerned about what others believe are differential patterns in their behavior. However, experienced principals have learned—often the hard way—that differences in perceptions, whether they are right or wrong, represent real beliefs and views of others. As a consequence, these perceptions must be understood, appreciated, and addressed.

Chapter 2 discussed the importance of developing a strong sense of self-awareness as a critical skill for beginning principals. Remember that of all the behaviors noted by superintendents, the most valued was the ability to show clearly one's personal beliefs and values and a recognition of why one was selected for a leadership role in the first place. Incidentally, it will be interesting to see if Charles's superintendent changes his or her rating of Charles when the building report form is late again!

Self-awareness about one's duties and responsibilities in a job comes about largely as the product of a reflective process in which one constantly matches the requirements of the job with a personal value system. The more a person is content that his or her choice of a career is consistent with the most important attitudes, values, and beliefs that drive a person, the happier he or she will be—and the more effective, productive, and ultimately successful. It is a simple fact that when a person becomes more invested in a job as a personal commitment, he or she will not only be more satisfied but more effective as well.

The strategy I'm suggesting as a way to review one's personal value and belief system as it relates to the realities of the job of the principalship is by a periodic review of something I'll call a personal educational platform. A platform is a philosophical statement, although I'm avoiding the term "philosophical" because most practicing administrators stay away from things that are too philosophical or theoretical. A platform statement puts into writing some of the nearest and dearest beliefs that a person might have about the educational issues that define a major part of his or her work life. It is often said that the major planks in a platform express an individual's nonnegotiable values. In many ways, they represent the core values of a person—the kinds of things that, if violated by the nature of the job one has to do or other factors, would cause a person to quit the job. A personal educational platform has the power of putting on paper the bottom line of an individual educator.

Finally, a statement of a platform has the potential either (a) to guide a person away from a professional role that is inconsistent with personal values or simply (b) to enable a person to know when a particular placement in a job is not what was envisioned in the first place. For example, a platform can help a person recognize if selecting the principalship as a career goal was a good choice or if taking a particular principalship in a specific community was the best move. In either case, if the personal values that are expressed in a platform are not attainable in a job in one location, it may be reasonable to move on.

Building a Platform

In the pages that follow, I will lead you through the development of an educational platform. Many different approaches might be followed in carrying out this exercise. You are invited to modify anything offered here so that it is more consistent with your own needs, interests, and of course, personal values.

You will be asked several questions that have to do with the central issues faced by educators, in most cases regardless of whether they work in classrooms or administrative offices. After each question, space is provided for you to write down your responses. Simply filling in the blanks does not necessarily mean that you have prepared an educational platform. However, your answers below might serve as an important foundation for a more cohesive statement that you will craft in the future.

1. What is my view of the purpose of schooling?

People have struggled with this issue for almost as long as there have been formal organizations called schools. Is it your view that students attend these formal organizations to acquire vocational skills? For moral development? To develop basic skills primarily? To learn about good citizenship and other civic values? Perhaps other purposes guide your vision, as noted below.

2. What are the key ingredients of an "adequate" education for all students?

There has been a lot of talk about how to get schools back to basics. Although this phrase has become a kind of a slogan for a particular conservative point of view regarding schooling, each educator must have some sense of what the basic elements of good schooling might include.

3. What is the appropriate role for students?

Perhaps an even more important issue to be considered here concerns one's personal view of who students are. It is widely assumed that educators all have a core value that speaks to the centrality of the needs of pupils as the driving force in schools. Although this may sound appealing and "right," is it truly your vision and value?

4. What is the appropriate role for teachers?

Again, the question might revolve around your personal definition of who teachers are in the first place. Some people view teachers as true professionals who have the best interests of their students in mind as they proceed with their duties. Others view teachers as district employees who can be replaced with others who have the same certification and academic degrees. Are these views consistent with your perspective, or do you have other notions of who teachers are and what they should be doing in schools?

5. What is the appropriate role for parents and other community members?

Most schools greet visitors with a sign or decal on the front door with a statement such as, "This is your school—and welcome to it." But do you mean that? Are parents truly partners in the educational program or are they intruders? What about the great majority of community members out there who pay taxes but who do not have children enrolled in your (or any other) school? What about your views on private businesses in your community?

6. What is my personal definition of "curriculum"?

Modern definitions of effective principals note that they are instructional, or curricular, leaders. What does this mean in practice? Part of it must be based on one's ability to have a clear personal understanding of what the curriculum is and what it should be in a particular school setting. For example, how inclusive shall a school's curriculum be?

7. What do I want this school to become?

What is your personal vision for the school? What kinds of hopes and dreams for a more effective school drive your work? What are your ideals?

8. How will I know if students learned?

The ultimate goal of any school must be to ensure that learning has taken place among students. But what are the indicators, at least in your mind, of whether or not this has really taken place? Some say that students' scores on standardized achievement tests are valid indicators, whereas some say learning really occurs only when established outcomes or performances are reached. What is your answer?

9. How do I want others to see me?

It is important for a leader to reflect on the kinds of images that he or she projects to followers. How do you hope that you will be viewed by your teachers, staff, students, and community members? Think about this issue in two ways, as a principal and also as a person.

10. What are my nonnegotiable values?

This last question might be the single most important issue to be addressed in your platform. Ultimately, this question asks you to consider the kinds of things that, if violated by the system or by other people with whom you must work, would cause you to throw your keys on the table and seek employment elsewhere.

What Do You Do With the Platform?

The value in an educational platform is not found by simply writing it out one time, putting it in a file cabinet, and then letting it sit there for the rest of your professional life. Rather, it should be seen as a living document or statement regarding the parameters you will put around different decisions made in your career. Platforms will change as you move through your professional life. For example, your thinking about the desirability of standardized testing as a way to measure student growth and progress may change drastically from day to day until some point in the future. Your vision of "perfect" teachers may be modified greatly as you move further away from your days in that same role.

The development of a formal statement of values through the educational platform has many important applications that can be of great assistance to you as you travel through your career as an educational leader. For one thing, developing clarity regarding your nonnegotiable values—even though these might change in the future—can be a genuine help to you as you think about changing jobs, moving to other districts, accepting transfers within the school system, and so on. For example, I know many colleagues who have turned their backs on higher salaries and more prestigious jobs because taking these jobs would cause them to compromise more important professional values, such as being able to stay home more with their family or continuing to work with students from populations needing attention.

Second, the articulation of a clear statement of an educational platform is of value to those with whom you are to work, both at your individual school site and also coworkers across your district. It isn't a good idea to print multiple copies of your platform and then send them around to everyone you might meet! However, people who have taken the time to write their platforms from time to time inevitably have a stronger grasp of their own values, so that those around them are also able to see what makes them tick. This not only has the benefit of enabling principals to be open to their staffs, but it is also a powerful way to model communication skills that lead to more effective schooling in general. In the long run, becoming more clear about your personal educational values will assist you in these cases in which you may seek other professional positions. For example, an opening for a principalship in another school district that seems more prestigious or offers more in terms of salary might not be nearly as desirable once you consider the possible compromises that might be needed with regard to your personal values.

Finally, the ultimate value of developing a clear statement of an educational platform may be that it can serve as the foundation for long-term professional development. Too often, educators simply drift through their careers and engage in sporadic and periodic programs of professional growth and development based on learning more about one hot topic or another, or because the central office has made it clear that "all principals ought to jump on this or that bandwagon." In many cases, principals simply respond to the visions or platforms of others. It would be far more desirable for principals to engage in systematic career planning that is rooted in their own values and sense of where they are going or what is important to them. For this reason, it is often suggested that people begin their professional development portfolios with a clear statement of their platforms. In that way, other elements of the portfolio are able to flow in a logical sequence from a strong foundation.

Your Personal Plan

In the next few pages, sketch out some of the more critical elements of your personal portfolio and growth plan. You may wish to consult and respond to the questions posed earlier, or you may respond to other critical issues that will provide a greater sense of who you are as a professional educator.

Now that you have written the planks of your platform, the last step in this self-improvement process involves a clear statement of what you plan to do to implement your personal vision of effective practice. Once you have completed this last step, a final valuable activity involves sharing your statement with one or two close friends, family members, or colleagues with a simple request that they indicate whether or not they recognize in you some of what you have written and whether or not you have written a real or ideal description.

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Being a "Boss"

SHARON MITCHELL was really excited last summer when she got the word that she had been selected as the new principal of O'Hare Elementary School, a small building with a great reputation for effective teachers and very supportive parents. As a teacher at the Midway School located only a few blocks away from O'Hare, Sharon was able to see what was going on in her new school. She was always impressed with the place, and now she felt she had died and gone to heaven when she learned that her first administrative job would be at O'Hare.

Soon after she moved into her new office in early July, Sharon began to realize that being a principal carried a lot of responsibilities not generally covered in the official school district policy manual or established job description. Furthermore, she saw quickly that the courses she had completed for state principal certification at Meiggs University had not really provided her with a complete picture of her new school or her job as a principal.

For example, she quickly understood that now that she was the principal, people reacted to her quite differently. She had known most of the teachers at O'Hare for many years. But now, as they began to come back to their classrooms for the start of the next school year, she could feel a distinct chill in the air. She was now "Mrs. Mitchell" to many who had referred to her as simply "Sharon" in the past. Also, it now seemed like a major production just to get out of her building at the same time each day so that she could get home to prepare dinner for her family, a task she now looked forward to simply because it reminded her of a time last year when she could really get something accomplished in a predictable way. And the smiling folks at the central office who said so many supportive things during the job interview process were beginning to make it increasingly clear that she would be treated like all the other principals in the district, even though most other administrators had at least 6 years of experience in their roles.

Finally, Sharon was becoming increasingly weary of the seemingly endless parade of parents and other community members who came to her door on a daily basis with "just one more simple little question" or request, often issues and requests that had been denied by the former principal. But Sharon was new on the scene, and many people wanted to test her resolve about a variety of issues.

The school year had just begun, and Sharon was not completely certain that she would be able to make it to Halloween!

* * *

When people take their first principalships, the reaction and situation are often not very different from the scenario described above. Being named as a school principal may be the fulfillment of a long-standing ambition. All the conditions associated with a particular position might be quite favorable in terms of the location of a school, an individual's feeling of comfort with the school, the reputation of the teachers, and so on. Even with all these factors going the right way, however, it is impossible to ignore the fact that when you become a principal for the first time, you will face certain issues. One of these is that people will look at you differently, expect different things from you, and hold you accountable in ways that will be markedly different from what they did in the past. Simply stated, you are now "the boss," and this designation carries certain challenges and demands. Once again, this fact reinforces the demand described in earlier chapters, namely that a critical skill for beginners must be recognition of how the job of being a principal is related to your own sense of self.

No matter how well prepared you may feel as you move into a formal leadership role for the first time, it is impossible to escape the fact that being the boss brings with it certain pressures and demands. This chapter will identify some of the things that any newcomer is likely to face during the first part of the transition into the principal's office. If you have already served in the capacity of an assistant principal, you have no doubt had some insights into these issues, although there is still no substitute for serving as the top administrator in a school. When the weight of full responsibility for an organization falls on your shoulders, it is very different from serving as an assistant.

This chapter also includes some practical hints for helping you increase your self-awareness and feelings of identity so that you can meet the pressures of leadership with greater confidence.

Others' Perceptions

As Sharon Mitchell discovered very quickly, one of the things that changes almost immediately when you become the principal is the way other people see you. Of course, you don't feel a lot different from the way you were just a few weeks ago. Admittedly, you may now be considerably more tired, and you may often feel that there aren't enough hours in a day to provide you with the time needed to carry out your new job. But down deep, you know that you are still the same person you have been for your whole life. It's just that people around you—teachers, office and custodial staff, parents, and students—perceive you differently and interact differently with you. You should not deliberately try to change, but you need to recognize that the perceptions of others can be powerful forces that will affect you directly or will affect the ways in which *other* people will see you. In the long run, these are the kinds of things that will enable you to be more effective as a school principal.

Before I list some of the ways beginning principals are perceived differently by people who work with them, if you are currently in your first year as a principal (or if you talk with people who are now beginning principals), list some of the ways you have noticed people treating the rookie principal differently from the way they did in the past. (For example, do people seem less inclined to talk openly with you about some of their professional concerns now?)

Researchers have noted that beginning principals receive signals from teachers, colleague administrators, parents (and other community members), students, and immediate family members that suggest they are somehow different now that they are the boss.

Teachers, even in these days of increased empowerment and efforts to provide opportunities for involvement in decision making, still tend to look toward someone being "in charge." As a result, the role of the formal school leader may change somewhat in tone (perhaps from "director" to "facilitator"). But when you are the principal of a school, people will continue to look at you as a person who will make critical decisions in times of need. What is often difficult to remember, however, is that each teacher has a very strong sense of when the time of need is to arise. Some staff members will rarely come directly to you as the principal to make decisions for them. On the other hand, every school will have a teacher or two (or more) who will rely on you as the boss to tell them what should be done about even seemingly insignificant issues ("Would it be all right for me to open a few windows in my classroom, even though it's raining?")

A second aspect of becoming the boss relates to the idea implied by the often cited sign on President Truman's desk: "The buck stops here." When you are in charge of something, whether it's a small elementary school, a large high school, or a huge school district, you are the person who is ultimately responsible for the effective operation of that organization. You cannot make a mistake and then blame it on someone else. Having made that last statement, however, there are nonetheless some principals who tend to attribute any unpopular decision to the fact that "the central office made me do it" or "we have to do it because the state requires it." Such principals are typically not respected by their administrative peers, and they are usually not very effective leaders.

Another price that novice principals often pay is the loneliness they suddenly feel in their school systems. It is ironic that in many cases, individuals move into administrative positions within their school systems largely because they are recognized as people with great interpersonal and social skills; their peers like and admire them. Often, they are at the center of professional and social gatherings, leading many to assume that they will carry these skills into the principal's office. Many newcomers are then amazed to find out that, as one new principal said, they have "crossed the line" separating themselves from their teacher friends when they became a principal. It is as one principal reported: "Last year, when I was still a teacher and I walked into the teachers' lounge, I was the center of attention and had a chance to talk with everyone. This year, as the principal, I walk into that same lounge and there's a dead silence. Same school, same teachers, same me. But people used to talk to me. Now, I know they talk about me."

So What Do You Do?

People will start to look at you very differently when you take on the role of principal. People react to this fact in a number of ways, some of which may be quite unproductive. For example, some new principals discover that their teachers are not engaging them in the ways they did in the past. The principal's reaction might be to put the teachers out of their lives. They begin to build walls and isolate themselves. Soon, principals who adopt this stance begin to spend most of their time in their offices or out of their buildings. A common symptom of this situation involves the principal beginning to view things in terms of "us" (or "me") versus "them," with "them." being all teachers.

Another behavioral pattern often adopted by principals who sense separation from their teaching staffs is the tendency to internalize everything and make everything their sole responsibility. They stop delegating even small tasks. The result can be very unfortunate as these principals feel stress increasing because they don't have time to do everything, they have no friends, they can't rely on anyone, they have no one to help them do their jobs, and so on.

A third approach seen in some beginning principals faced with the sense that they are no longer accepted by their teaching colleagues is to take on a deliberate stance of being officious. They hide behind rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and anything else that might serve to depersonalize their jobs. In this way, they can develop the sense that they are not involved with people who are rejecting them. Their stance is one of coming to work, following rules, avoiding contact whenever possible, and then going home without worrying about the people they work with. They tend not to be very happy people on the job, to say the least.

Finally, some new principals deal with their sense of separation from teachers by rejecting their roles as administrators and striving to appear as if they are still part of the teaching team. Although this may not at first sound like a problem—after all, isn't it good to still be a teacher?—some major difficulties will inevitably arise when beginning principals avoid becoming a boss. It is important to remember, for example, that a major responsibility of a principal is the evaluation of staff, often with the result being an unhappy decision involving a person's career. Although principals should not avoid contact with their teachers only because they may have to evaluate them negatively some day, some distance between teachers and administrators may not be totally undesirable.

The fact is, no matter how you may wish to deal with it, the step you have taken from your former life as a teacher into administration means that certain relationships will change and that new expectations and demands will naturally follow you into your new role. But that sort of transition does not have to be traumatic or cause the kinds of negative behaviors I have noted above. As one principal observed a few years back, "When you become a principal, you have to remember that you are still part of the family that you were a member of before. But now, you are the head of that family. Your job now becomes one of doing all you can to promote the well-being of everyone. You can't be a buddy, but you have to be a friend in the truest sense." Differences do not necessarily mean that you care less for everyone in the family. The trick of administration often is to demonstrate your caring about others through the establishment of trust. When you achieve that level of interaction, differences between you—the *boss*—and the teachers—the *employees*—will begin to disappear. In short, if you want separation, you can find it. On the other hand, if you want effective teamwork, you have to work on that, too, but it can be achieved.

Being in charge of any organization can be stressful and can serve to make a person feel alone and even rejected by others from time to time. This is particularly true in those cases in which people are promoted from within—one day they work with a group of people, but the next day, they are making those people work for them. Nevertheless, things can be done to reduce the sense of separation one feels and without resorting to the ways I described earlier. Your job is not to agonize over the sense of separation but to promote a sense of unity in your school.

What are some of the ways in which you have addressed the issue of feeling apart from your teachers now that you've crossed the line and become the boss? (For example, some principals promote monthly "sharing sessions" in which they invite their teachers to spend half an hour or so talking about the professional concerns they are facing.)

Strategies to Reduce Isolation

The best way to help you reduce your sense of becoming isolated involves making links with key people inside and outside your building.

Inside your building, it is critical that you build bridges with a few key individuals who can serve as sounding boards for you throughout the school year. This is not always an easy task. It is nearly impossible to tell who can be trusted as a confidant when you first walk into a new school. This is particularly true if you are new to the school district and you have no clear idea of who the players are going to be. Nevertheless, it is essential to find allies in your immediate environment. If you are in an elementary school or a fairly small secondary school, it is likely that the first person who comes to your mind as a person to be trusted is the secretary for the school. She or he will likely know more about the real issues that face your school than just about anyone else you will first encounter. The only thing that needs to be safeguarded in such situations, of course, is the possibility that insights into what and who are important in your new school might be clouded by that person's perceptions. Also, there is a possibility that well-intentioned conversations about key people in your school might become opportunities for gossip and hearsay. Secretaries have great insights into what is going on in schools. On the other hand, at times they do not know all the reasons why people behave in the ways they do.

If you happen to work in a school that has assistant principals, these individuals might also serve as natural members of your inner circle of confidants. There are, of course, some restrictions to this suggestion. For example, finding out that one or more of your assistants was an unsuccessful applicant for your job might make you think twice about that person being an ongoing supporter. Also, you may quickly determine that one of the things you must do in your principalship is to encourage your assistant principals to seek other opportunities for professional advancement. In other words, you may need to find a new assistant principal. Despite these reservations, however, reliance on assistant principals as sources if important information about your new school can effectively reduce your sense of isolation from what is really going on.

A third potential source of support inside your school are the few teachers with whom you can feel comfortable in opening up and sharing some personal concerns. Again, these people will not be visible at first as you move into a school; you will have to spend some time and make an effort to find teachers who can be trusted on a continuing basis. Remember, too, that those who come forward in the first few days of your new administrative role are often the last persons who will become enduring supporters. In this regard, you should rely on experiences that you had as a classroom teacher. Eventually, each class has a few students who become close allies of the teacher. The same can be said of the dynamics in any teaching staff that you join. Incidentally, this is one of the places where a firm appreciation and understanding of your educational platform will be a critical part of your success. How do you look at teachers, for example? As you think through your responses to this issue, your relationships with a few valued colleagues will emerge.

Finally, as you try to assess key issues and other aspects of the internal realities of your school, do not forget that in many cases, you will have inherited a structure for operating your school that may be quite helpful. It is likely that committees and task forces are already in place that were formed prior to your arrival. Spending some time with members of these groups can be an important tool for you as you try to develop a comprehensive and positive picture of what's going on.

If these types of work groups don't already exist, you might think about announcing that you want nominations of staff to serve on a building "Steering Committee" or "Instructional Improvement Committee." As people are identified by others as possible candidates for this work, you will develop not only a strong core of people with whom you may be able to work on a variety of projects, but you will also gain insights into which people in your school are perceived by their peers as leaders.

As you think about your present school, who might be included as members of your inner circle of confidants? (Will you include your secretary? Assistant principal? Team leaders? A teacher or two with whom you used to work when you were in the classroom?)

Your Personal Plan

Again, the issues we have reviewed in this chapter deal with self-awareness or role awareness skills as one of the concerns of beginning administrators. In the space below, you may wish to write down some of your frustrations that you are now experiencing because you're the boss in your school. These frustrations might be linked to the items identified earlier, or they might be unique concerns that you have found relate to your first job as a school principal. In either case, you ought to include these issues as part of the process of building your own personal portfolio and growth plan. Unless you identify some of those issues, you will never be able to deal effectively with them. For each item listed as a frustration, you may also indicate some of the ways in which you have been able to cope with it and proceed with your work as an educational leader.

10

Building a Personal Timeline for Learning and Development

Barbara Philips was determined not to make the same mistakes that others had made when they got their first principalships. She knew that other rookies had stepped into their jobs with the clear intention of simply "surviving" their first year by sitting back and waiting for things to happen. Barbara believed that as a new principal in a very traditional school district like Fort Grayson, she had only a brief honeymoon period—a window of opportunity in which she could make the kinds of changes that would enable her school to rise above the other junior high schools in the district. She was committed to hitting the ground running and pushing hard for reforms in her school.

At the same time, Barbara was aware of the fact that as a beginning principal, she had to learn about schools, educational administration practice, and the latest research on effective teaching and learning. As a result, she was rapidly becoming more and more fatigued as the school year wore on. She was beginning to recognize the fact that she might be burned out before the start of the second half of the school year.

* * *

Often, when people achieve a major professional goal such as being hired as a school principal for the first time, they have an understandable tendency to want to accomplish a huge amount in as short a time as possible. Indeed, some research even suggests that when people step into a new leadership role, they have only about 12 to 18 months to change the organization in which they now work. If they wait too long, there is a strong tendency for them to become part of the existing scenery, part of the organization that should be changed. This finding, incidentally, is contrary to conventional wisdom that suggests that the new leader should keep a low profile when first coming on board; he or she should do nothing to upset people by trying to make too many changes too quickly. The problem, of course, is that moving too fast as a new leader has serious drawbacks. Change might occur, but the cost to the new person might be more than is reasonable as health begins to fail, personal relationships suffer, and followers get caught up in a hectic pace that cannot be maintained for very long.

As new principals review their personal values, dispositions toward leadership, and actual leadership skills, they will need to develop a plan and a related timeline to guide their personal and professional development as leaders. This planning process is the focus of this chapter.

A central theme of this book is that simply being equipped with a collection of survival skills to get you through the first year or two on the job is not enough. Of course, when you take any new job, you have a natural interest in learning how to increase your initial comfort by completing assigned tasks in a competent, timely, and efficient manner. There is a lot of truth in the old saying that you can't be a leader if you get fired. As a result, the emphasis in this book is on what to expect at the start of your career. But avoid the temptation of believing that being "good enough" is an adequate way to look at your career as a school principal. My goal is to assist you in developing a long-term vision of leadership that goes well beyond simple survival skills.

This chapter will assist you in setting up a personal guideline that you might follow as you journey from being a true rookie to eventual status as a veteran educational leader in your present—or some other—school system.

A Developmental Framework

One point needs to be recognized very quickly. As a beginner, you want to do a good job, and the job that you have selected as a career is a big one. There may be a strong tendency for you to want to do a lot of things right away and make certain that everything you do is a resounding success. After all, the superintendent and school board that hired you probably told you on numerous occasions that they were pleased you were joining them, that they had high hopes for you to really "make a difference," and that you were just the right person to do a great job! Perhaps the exact words you heard are not what's written here, but there is little doubt that when a new principal comes to a school, people have high hopes that the newcomer will either do the same wonderful things accomplished by his or her predecessor or make the kinds of changes that will immediately straighten up the mess left by the former principal. Variations on these two themes are possible, but the fact is that people want the new principal to do all sorts of things, beginning with the first days on the job.

As a beginner, you will have a natural tendency to try to please everyone, meet all expectations, and do a truly outstanding job at all times. But here's a secret: You can't do all the above. Furthermore, if you try to do everything with equal zeal and attention right away, you're likely to be less effective in your new job. Many researchers suggest that people proceed through clearly identified stages, or developmental phases, as they move into new roles. Here are five suggested phases to consider.

Phase 1. This may be referred to as "coming on board." This period should normally last 1 or 2 years. It begins with a person first being named to a principalship. It ends at different times for different people, but generally it will be at the point where a person feels comfortable enough with a new role that he or she is no longer concerned about losing a job for failing to do certain assigned tasks. People who are in this phase tend to be mostly concerned with their own survival needs. As a result, discussions about long-term goals and projects for a school or district are not extremely relevant. Furthermore, a principal in this coming on board phase is likely to think more about his or her personal needs above any concerns related to the professional well-being of his or her staff.

Phase 2. After principals have developed some degree of comfort in the job and they are no longer experiencing any serious anxiety about whether or not they are going to survive and simply do the job, they are likely to enter a second developmental phase. After about 2 years on the job, people should start to seek new ways of measuring effectiveness and success. This phase is called the "searching for success" time, because principals at this point in their careers realize that they can do the job, but now they wish to do the job well. This phase is a progression beyond coming on board (Phase 1), but it is a time when principals are still likely to be more concerned with their own needs—or personal definitions of success—than they are with the broader needs of colleagues or the total organization. On the other hand, during this phase, there should be a definite shift from thinking only about survival as a reactive response to trying to move the school forward proactively. Again, no absolute timeline is established for this phase, but it is normally relatively brief for most people, lasting for only 1 or 2 years.

Phase 3. This is a time of "looking outward." It is at this point that many principals start to question whether what they are doing is starting to have any positive effect on others. In some ways, it is very difficult to distinguish this stage from Phase 2, because during both phases, principals tend to focus on the issue of impact of administrative behavior. The critical issue here, however, is that principals at this point are asking the questions "Does what do I really have any effect on the teachers, staff, and most important, students?" and "Can I have a substantive impact on practices here so that we can improve the school?" One of the critical things to remember about this phase, if a principal enters it, is that the beginning of the phase may not happen until after 3 or 4 years of service. On the other hand, some principals may spend many years in their jobs without ever entering this phase. But in the case of good principals, it is also a phase that will never end.

Phase 4. This stage in a principal's career, which may come sometime after about 10 years on the job, may be referred to as the "torch-passing" phase. What happens in this phase is the beginning of an interest in trying to find, recruit, and prepare other people to take an interest in moving into careers as educational leaders. This gets played out through principals (a) taking great pride in selecting specific individuals as assistants; (b) encouraging and sponsoring one or more of their teachers to think about future careers in school administration by taking courses at a local university; (c) taking on the duties of sponsorship and, to some extent, mentorship to draw new people into the profession; and (d) taking on their personal duties of developing the talents of others and improving the profession in general. Clearly, this phase is characterized largely by attention directed toward the needs of others, the school or district, and the profession of the principalship in general. It is a significant departure from the first two phases, in which concerns and interests are mostly inwardly directed. No defined period of time is associated with people moving into this career phase. It may occur after 5 years of being in the principalship or after 15 or more years. In some cases, it may never be a part of an administrator's career.

Phase 5. At this point in an individual's career, there is a distinct return to personal needs and agendas. Here, attention is focused on the process of "closing out a career." This might appear as getting ready for retirement, or at least some sort of a shift into a career that is not the principalship. For instance, individuals get to a point where their interests are directed toward other positions such as superintendencies or other central office jobs. When a person gets to this point, she or he has more interest in other issues outside the daily responsibilities of the principalship.

A few summary observations are in order related to this listing of different developmental phases. First, these five stages are not static or linear. In other words, people might move back and forth from one phase to another. For example, an individual who moves from one principalship to another might go from Phase 3 (looking outward) or even Phase 4 (torch passing) and return to Phase 2 (searching for success) when faced with the prospect of learning about expectations, norms, and cultures of new schools and districts. In fact, the only phases in this model that are found at relatively predictable points in an administrative career are Phase 1 (coming on board) at the beginning and Phase 5 (closing out a career) at the end. The second observation about the five phases is that not everyone proceeds through all steps. For example, some people never become interested in passing the torch (Phase 4) or even looking outward (Phase 3). They tend to remain interested mostly in their own career needs, with little concern for colleagues or even the school systems around them. Although it may be unfortunate, it is nevertheless a reality that people sometimes become so focused on their own situations that they forget about their professional relationships with others. It happens often in personal relationships. Some people also have spent a large part of their careers in the coming on board phase (Phase 1); they never seem to learn or go beyond the limitations and perspectives of rookies. Suddenly, they shift from concerns, interests, and behaviors associated with newcomers to think about closing out a career (Phase 5). These principals literally go through an entire career without getting out of the starting block. People probably don't intend to do this, but it is a pattern that can happen if one focuses too early and too quickly on simply serving as a principal.

One final observation about the phases is that none of these steps is bounded by any strict time limits. For example, some people proceed quickly through the first three phases, often within the first 2 or 3 years of their professional lives. They spend the majority of their careers consciously serving as mentors to other practicing or aspiring educational administrators. Some people have even moved rapidly to the closing out a career phase (Phase 5), because their goal in becoming a principal in the first place was to use it as a stepping-stone on the way to the superintendency, a higher education position, or some other job in education.

You can no doubt think of examples of individual principals who were in one or another of these phases. You may also wish to list some examples of what you have already encountered at one or more of the phases I have identified:

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What's This Got to Do With Me?

These phases may be of interest to those concerned with looking at and analyzing the long-term career paths of administrators. But what relevance do they have for someone like you, who is either getting ready to step into a principalship for the first time or going through the first year or two on the job? After all, does it make any sense to think about serving as a mentor some day in the future while you are still trying to find a colleague to help you now?

Unless you realize and look at how careers progress in total, you may be frustrated and limited as you start your life as a principal. Typically, individuals walk into school systems where colleague principals are distributed across all the phases, with one exception: It is not unusual for a person to be the only principal who is coming on board (Phase 1) at a single time. As a result, a person can get lost in an environment where everyone else is either thinking about retirement or at least focused almost exclusively on searching for success (Phase 2) as a personal concern. Any newly hired principal needs to find a mentor; however, some districts have no principals who are even remotely interested in torch passing (Phase 4). (I will discuss the issue of finding a mentor in Chapter 11.) When a district has no one to serve as a mentor, it may be necessary for a new principal to seek support from an administrator in another school system.

Another implication from the phases that relates to the needs of beginning principals is the fact that knowing about this predictable progression might help you in thinking about your life as an administrator down the road. For example, it's important for you to recognize that it's understandable that the next few years on the job might find you spending a lot of time and energy thinking about personal needs. That is important. Numerous rookie principals have expressed anxiety and almost a sense of guilt over the fact that they were not accomplishing as much as they wanted to accomplish as quickly as they had hoped. They were not becoming the effective instructional leaders suggested as goals in the research literature. Instead, they felt as if most of their time was being invested in personal concerns.

The first few years are likely to be the ones in which individuals establish their own sense of identity and comfort in their roles. As one new principal once said, "I can't get too concerned about changing the world until I get my own house in order." It is perfectly understandable that you are probably not getting too involved with thoughts of torch passing (Phase 4) just yet. On the other hand, you may be tempted to feel guilty about not getting involved in more than personal interests. After all, in many cases, new principals are alone as rookies in their school systems, and as a result, it is not unusual for them to feel apart from colleagues and not committed completely to the goals and objectives of the larger school system. As more than one beginning principal has noted over the years, "Before I become a great instructional leader, I just want to get through each day of my first year on the job."

Each new principal will have to establish her or his own realistic timeline that will permit movement from one phase to another. Some people will be able to move very quickly during the first few weeks of service from simply coming on board (Phase 1) to Phase 2, in which they are already looking for ways of improving the overall programs for students, teachers, parents, and the whole community. This might be based on a variety of reasons, such as the nature of their teaching staffs, the size of the districts, the quality of their preservice preparation program (and internship experiences), whether or not they have an assistant principal, whether they worked before in this district as a teacher, and so on. Some people may need more than a year to go beyond initial culture shock and progress beyond the coming on board phase (Phase 1).

The important thing that any new principal needs to remember is that time spent as a rookie is valuable time in terms of a long-term career. Don't rush too quickly toward trying to learn a whole new system and change the world in 1 month simply because the research on effective schools says that principals must make an immediate difference. It simply is not going to happen overnight for everyone. And you should not get discouraged if you don't understand everything as quickly as you had hoped you might.

The key to effectiveness is not going too fast or dragging your feet waiting for the "perfect" time to foster change. Perhaps a very effective strategy to follow is the development of a realistic set of annual plans to guide your work. This is an organized way to initiate change while allowing you to look at your school objectively. This type of planning might begin during your second year as a principal, and it probably ought to continue throughout your career. On the following pages, I've provided an outline for this type of systematic planning.

Developing a Personal Timeline for Action

A critical part of preparing a personal professional development portfolio and action plan involves not only stating *what* you plan to do, but even more important, *when* you are going to do things. The last section of this chapter proposes that you develop a personal timeline that you will follow as you set out to meet certain professional goals during your first year on the job. Remember, you cannot accomplish everything at once, but you may never accomplish anything without a serious plan to determine which things are to happen first. Another helpful tip might be to make certain that you bounce these goals off a few people you trust. Seeking this type of feedback can be very useful to you in thinking about goals and priorities.

GOAL 1

The first goal I hope to accomplish in this first year as a principal is

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I hope to achieve this goal by

The latest date I expect to achieve this goal is

GOAL 2

The second goal I hope to accomplish in this first year is

I hope to achieve this goal by

The latest date I expect to achieve this goal is

GOAL 3

The third goal I hope to accomplish in this first year is

I hope to achieve this goal by

The latest date I expect to achieve this goal is

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This chapter concludes by providing a place above for you to write three goals, but this does not mean that as a first-year principal you shouldn't try more than three goals. At the same time, you should not try to do too many things at once. The ultimate answer to the question of what is the right number of things for a rookie to try is something that only you can provide. How much is enough, and which things should be done first, is not something that this book can prescribe. Nor is it something that your superintendent, your school board, or central office can dictate. It is legitimate, of course, for superintendents to charge principals with goals that need to be addressed in all schools of the district. After all, you are part of a larger system. However, if your personal objective is simply to make certain that you do not do anything contrary to what your bosses tell you to do, then you will do little more than follow their priorities as much as possible.

On the other hand, what you do, when you do it, and how you do it will always be matters that come from within you and your individual set of values and beliefs. Once again, the platform exercise described earlier is critical to your success. And sharing that platform with others—your staff as well as the superintendent—will do much to increase effective communication so that you can meet the expectations of others and also focus on your personal objectives with equal commitment.

11

Building a Support System

TONI SPENCER had just suffered through what was undoubtedly the single worst day of her first year as an elementary school principal. Before she had even left the house this morning, she got a call from Harriet Wilson, her secretary (and virtual assistant principal), who said that she had a family emergency and would not be in today and perhaps the remainder of the week. When Toni arrived at school, she found Hank Gentry, the custodian, busily trying to scrub some fresh graffiti off one of the doors to the playground. Next, while Toni was working with the substitute secretary (a woman who made it clear that she would not like to work for long in an elementary school) to orient her to the front office routine of the day, the phone rang almost endlessly. In less than 5 minutes, Toni received word that two teachers were going to be late and three more were ill and would not be in at all today. Substitutes would be needed. That was fine, except Toni knew that subs were really hard to find this week. The neighboring Mountain City Schools were in the midst of a lengthy teachers' strike, and their school board was bound and determined to keep the schools open by bringing in substitutes from every school district around. And that meant that Toni would not have a lot of luck in finding subs at the last minute. This was going to be one of those days when "creative class coverage" would take effect. Toni knew she would be in the classroom most of the morning.

Taking over classes from time to time was not something Toni didn't like. In fact, she looked forward to getting back in the trenches to work with the kids on occasion. But today, she knew that the president of her PTO would be visiting the school just before lunch to talk about the big spring fashion luncheon. And Dr. Crawford, the district director of evaluation, needed to talk to her about the testing schedule for the primary grades. That had to be done today. The school board committee on testing was meeting for dinner this evening.

Despite all the things that were on her mind, Toni had the day pretty well under control by mid-morning. She felt as if this tough day was on the down side and that it would be over before it got any worse. She was just returning from her office from one of the fourth-grade rooms where a substitute teacher couldn't find a class roster. Mrs. Turner, the substitute secretary, met her in the hall to tell her about a sixth-grade student who had just been brought down to her office by the phys ed teacher for carrying a knife to class. She also heard that the fire department was going to pull a fake fire alarm at some point today and that the superintendent was coming over later with a parent, but that "he didn't want to discuss the issue over the phone." Toni was still in some degree of shock over the conversation she had a few minutes ago with a group of sixth-grade boys who told her they had seen a fifth grader passing out what they thought were drugs on a vacant lot a few blocks from school earlier this morning.

It was another one of those days when "lunch" (two candy bars and a cup of instant coffee) didn't come until nearly 2:00. As soon as Toni was able to get to her office for a few minutes to reflect on her discussion with the superintendent and the irate parent, the fire alarm, the in-school suspension given to the sixth-grade "knife" (actually, can opener) carrier, and about a dozen other situations that had arisen that day, the phone rang. An officer from the police department was calling to alert her that she might be visited by a man claiming to be the father of one her third graders. This same person—a known child molester—had appeared at other elementary schools in another suburb a few times over the past 2 weeks. If he did show up, Toni was advised to keep an eye on him, try to divert him from the children, and call the police immediately, all without doing anything to tip off the unwanted visitor before the police could arrive. The first thing Toni did after getting off the phone was to visit each of her teachers and quietly explain the situation so that they would be aware of the potential problem.

Now it was nearly 5:00. Toni had already gotten word that her secretary would be out for the entire week, the substitute secretary didn't like how cold the office was, two of today's absent teachers would be out again tomorrow, and three more teachers were going to a district workshop on inclusion tomorrow. Toni faced having at least five teachers out tomorrow, an unhappy secretary (who might not even report to work), and the consequences of a number of disciplinary decisions that she had to make, including the in-school suspension. Angry parents were sure to be in her office tomorrow. But that would be after Toni got to work a bit late because she would park down the street from the vacant lot where the drug dealing was supposedly taking place. She hadn't completely believed the story she heard yesterday, but she couldn't afford to discount the tale entirely. She wanted to see things with her own eyes before she called the police. And the imposter father might show up at any time. In addition, Toni was worried about her own children—one of whom was a third grader at another school in the district. Her husband was out of town on a business trip, and her ninth-grade son was feeling depressed because he had been ignored by his basketball coach all season.

There were simply some days when you have to wonder why you do what you do!

* * *

Do the things that happened to Toni sound familiar? Perhaps you've been lucky enough not to have a single day quite as bad as hers. Or maybe the day that Toni experienced was actually an easy day on your calendar. The point is that all principals, regardless of experience, level of school, size of school, type of school district, or any other variable that might be introduced, have very important, difficult, and demanding jobs. And the fact is that the job will likely become even more demanding, critical, and stressful in the future. As more states and school districts race toward the adoption of decentralized forms of educational governance and administration, the spotlight will be directed even more on the principal's role in providing effective leadership. This fact must be recognized along with the other types of demands, expectations, and pressures that are placed on educators in general, and the principal in particular. Who could possibly imagine that elementary school principals (and principals in general) would someday be involved with planning escape routes and action plans in case students begin firing pistols and rifles on campus? And what about the need to work effectively with youngsters who walk into school each day from homes where parents are child abusers, drug dealers, or other forms of felons and sociopaths? What do principals do when students arrive at their schools after spending the night sleeping on floors or in bathtubs while listening to the sound of gunshots in their neighborhoods, afraid that a stray bullet might crash through a window or door of their home?

The listing of problems faced by modern principals ends here. For one thing, continuing to list all the problems may cause you to begin to question your decision about becoming a principal in the first place. Quite simply, the benefits of being a principal will likely far outweigh the problems and frustrations in the long run. Nevertheless, it is critical both for immediate survival and long-term success that you find some strategies to make certain that when the alligators are nipping at your ankles, you don't get swallowed up. Even Toni was able to come back and face another day!

This chapter offers a few strategies that have been identified by many very successful (and surviving) school principals who have learned how to cope with the numerous frustrations and pressures they experience on the job. You may have already adopted some of these suggestions on your own, and in that case, you may be well beyond the advice offered here. Or you may be in that unfortunate state where the problems and crises have been coming along so rapidly in your life that you haven't had much time to look up from your desk and find any useful survival strategies. In that case, this chapter could be extremely important.

Strategy 1: Find a Mentor

The single most powerful thing a beginning principal (and even experienced principals) can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness is to find at least one other experienced educational leader who can be available to share expertise related to doing the job more effectively and, perhaps even more important, help you understand yourself and your personal transition into the principalship more completely. A mentor can also help significantly with the complex task of becoming effectively socialized both into the overall profession of the principalship and also into the norms, culture, practices, and procedures of the school district in which you find your first job.

Do you already have at least one mentor who is helping you during this initial introduction to the principalship? (If so, who is it and what are some of the characteristics you have found in that person that make him or her particularly valuable to you as a mentor?)

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Research on administrative mentors has found the following characteristics of individuals frequently identified as effective mentors to aspiring and beginning school principals. (Compare these qualities with ones on the list you have prepared above.)

1. Mentors are experienced administrators who are regarded by peers and others as effective
2. Mentors demonstrate qualities of effective leaders, such as
   - Good communication skills
   - Intelligence

  - Clear vision of what could be
  - Positive interpersonal skills and sensitivity
3. Mentors ask the right questions; they do not simply provide the right answers
4. Mentors accept others' ways of doing things; they do not want everyone else to do it their way
5. Mentors desire other people to go beyond their present levels of performance
6. Mentors model principles of continuous learning and reflection
7. Mentors exhibit awareness of the political and social realities of life in at least one school system

You may have noticed the absence of some other characteristics that a lot of people have often assumed to be desirable for mentors. For example, many people assume that the most effective mentors are those with many years of experience as principals, as if survival on the job automatically results in wisdom and insight. Clearly, such experience is not always tied to effectiveness as a mentor. Some individuals may spend 20 years as principals, but unfortunately, they have done the same thing for 20 years in a row! Consequently, they haven't grown, and they haven't learned from their own past experiences. What are you likely to gain from working with people like this?

People also assume that men must mentor men and only women can mentor women. Although people often express a desire to have same-gender mentoring relationships (and for some reason, these are often easier to carry out), no research shows conclusively that men cannot be effective mentors to women (or vice versa). This is a comforting finding, particularly in the world of high school administration in which relatively few experienced women high school principals can be found to mentor beginning female colleagues.

People also incorrectly assume that only older individuals can serve effectively as mentors to younger administrators. Perhaps this image comes from the traditional view that the only thing a mentor does is fill up the protégé with a lot of tricks of the trade and lessons from the past. This is a very limited view of mentoring and one that has the potential of being more harmful than helpful to your career. The reason is that in many cases, new principals have been hired precisely because of a desire to get some new blood into the school system. There has been too long a history of doing the same things in the same ways. Mentors who see themselves only as people to help you do your job in an easier way may be inadvertently limiting your future potential success by telling you "how we've always done it around here."

Now that you have considered these additional issues regarding effective mentoring relationships, who are some individuals you might identify as potentially effective mentors for you as a beginning principal? (These may or may not be the same people you thought of at the beginning of this chapter.)

Strategy 2: Develop Networks

Another strategy to help you in the first years of the principalship is to develop networks with other administrators. These can take several forms. For example, if you are one of several rookie principals in a district, county, or some other identifiable region, you may wish to get in contact with these other inexperienced administrators to form some kind of contact for mutual support. You may wish to agree to get together once a month for a social gathering during which you can share some of your war stories (or even horror stories) about your life as a beginner. You will be surprised to learn that many of the "mistakes" that you believe you have made are ones made by a good many of your beginning colleagues (and more experienced colleagues as well).

Do you know of any other beginning principals in your area with whom you might be able to form a mutual support network?

Networks have also been formed among women principals. Only a few years ago, this was a rarity. Now, women administrator leagues and networks have appeared all over the country, generally based on the assumption that because school administration has generally been a man's game, it is critical to develop mutually supportive arrangements among those who want a share of the game. The same logic has been shared in the establishment of networks for representatives of ethnic and racial minority groups serving as school leaders.

The formation of networks is an important form of potential support that may assist you in the earliest stages of your career, with an important exception. In some instances, the primary goal of a network apparently has been only to maintain itself, not necessarily to provide support to individual participants. It is likely that as one matures in a professional role, it will be less important to maintain membership in a mutual support arrangement, whether that arrangement is classified as mentoring or a network. In those cases, it is important that you feel free to determine your own continuing membership. A relationship of any kind is no longer healthy when participants feel as if they are forced to continue to stay involved.

Strategy 3: Participate in Professional Associations

As you begin a new career, you will receive invitations for membership in professional organizations that provide opportunities for you to stay abreast of current educational issues and to become politically involved. Although these organizations do require some dedication of your time and financial resources, you should consider membership as a commitment to the improvement of not only your profession but also your own career.

Whether it is the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Middle School Association (NMSA), or the state or local affiliates of these nationwide organizations, belonging to an appropriate professional association has some clear and very obvious benefits. For example, you receive publications such as the NASSP *Bulletin* or the NAESP *Principal* magazines several times each year. These and many other fine newsletters and reports provided by the associations will help you to remain in contact with important research, trends, and issues that face principals all over the United States. Most state affiliates also offer periodic publications to keep you informed about matters of interest to you and your colleagues on a more localized basis.

Membership in professional associations also usually provides you with some form of professional liability insurance coverage that may help to keep you from financial damage if you happen to become involved in issues that may have legal consequences for you. Both NASSP and NAESP and their state affiliates also offer legal services hotlines to help you get feedback from lawyers and experienced administrators as you go about your daily work. Finally, membership in professional associations allows you to attend workshops, seminars, conferences, and conventions that help you maintain important social and professional contact with other principals across your state and around the United States.

Perhaps the single most important value to be gained from membership in relevant professional associations, however, has little to do with publications, legal services, liability insurance, or attendance at conventions. Simply stated, when you become involved in a national or state association of professional administrators, you develop a sense of belonging and involvement with your profession. By reading publications of your associations, attending meetings, and serving on committees, task forces, or other kinds of activities, you have a chance to hear or read about the world of administration through the eyes of other colleagues in other settings. Often, the job of principal feels like a lonely one because it seems that the problems and issues you encounter are of such magnitude that no one else has ever faced these concerns. Working with colleagues from other school systems (and from other states on occasion) is a quick way to establish that you are not alone. Others are walking in your shoes.

Professional association memberships cost money, and that is a resource most principals do not have as a surplus, particularly in the first few years of their careers. Often, your first principalship comes soon after you have completed (and paid for) graduate studies at a university. You may have also recently had to pay to relocate to a new community. In some cases, new principals report pay cuts from what they were earning as classroom teachers. Nevertheless, membership in appropriate state, local, and national associations is a worthwhile investment that can assist you in your daily life as a professional administrator.

Strategy 4: Maintain Personal and Family Support

The fourth and final form of support may be the most obvious one, but it is often overlooked as people embark upon new careers. Often, the most powerful way to help newcomers to a field is found in one's natural, immediate environment. As you begin your career as an administrator, it is likely that your world will be filled with so many new responsibilities, people, and activities that you will become overwhelmed with many competing demands and interests. Suddenly, things and events that were important to you only a few months ago seem distant and less important as you work hard to develop a new professional identity and self-image. Although that is understandable, it is critical to keep a personal focus on what is truly important in your life. Demands of a professional nature are important; the roots and foundation in your personal and family life are even more important and will be with you well beyond your career as the principal of a school.

The first recommendation, then, is to make certain that, whenever possible, you do whatever is needed and reasonable to retain some sense of normality in your personal life. Do not ignore family and friends. If you are a high school principal with night duties during the basketball season, don't forget your son's piano recital or your daughter's basketball tournament. Remember that the annual trek to the seashore was a big part of your life when you were a fourth-grade teacher; it is still important now that you are an elementary school principal. Don't forget to return phone calls to personal friends who knew you back in the old days, before you were such an important person. In short, keep your compass and perspective; don't forget what is really important to you. And remember that you can be a very effective and successful leader even if you take a night off to do nothing more critical than watch a sappy old movie on the VCR.

The second recommendation is related to your need to maintain your health. Critically ill principals are not very effective. Do not neglect matters of health, personal fitness, and well-being. This is important with respect to matters of physical well-being and also emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual health. Go to the doctor when you are sick and for regular examinations, exercise, eat right (and don't fall into the principal-as-martyr syndrome that seemingly rewards people for never eating lunch, skipping breakfast, and drinking coffee all day), and take care of your body. Get out of your office, forget about your work once in a while, read a trashy novel, attend a movie or concert, or do any of a thousand things that will remind you of your need to get out of your role as an educational administrator on occasion. (This reminder may be a difficult one for you. Educators are notorious for their tendency to eat, drink, and sleep schools and talk shop all the time.)

With regard to intellectual well-being, do something that challenges your mental capacity. Some school principals regularly take university courses or participate in study groups that have nothing to do with the field of education as a way to keep their minds sharp; they enroll in language courses or other programs that seemingly have nothing to do with schools as a way to keep contact with their spiritual core. And with regard to spiritual well-being, if you have always been involved with church-related activities throughout your life, is there any reason to stop this involvement simply because you have the title of "principal" on your door?

It's not possible to prescribe all the things you might do to ensure that you maintain a balance in your priorities as a beginning school principal. I'm not suggesting that the only route to happiness and success will be to maintain a perfect family life. After all, principals have situations in their personal lives during which traditional patterns of home and happiness might be interrupted or changed. And those situations might have nothing to do with their effectiveness as a principal or their personal well-being. At times, it will be impossible to get to the gym, play a round of golf, or attend an opera, even though these activities might be worthwhile. The critical message here is that it is not only a good idea but in some ways a critical responsibility for principals to think of their own personal needs above other issues.

Developing a Plan of Action

This chapter and this book conclude by asking you to plan a systematic way of putting into effect many of the support mechanisms identified here. It is absolutely important to select some clear ways in which you might reasonably expect to enjoy greater success in your job. By taking time to write out some of the sources of support you may find for yourself, you will become committed to these various approaches and activities.

Strategy 1: Find a Mentor

Who are some individuals who could serve in a mentoring capacity to you as you move into the principalship?

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What are some of the specific concerns associated with your work as a principal that you believe might be addressed by a mentoring relationship?

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Strategy 2: Develop Networks

Do you currently have any networks developed with other school principals?

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In what specific ways might your network assist you in dealing with concerns and issues you face as a beginning principal?

Strategy 3: Participate in Professional Associations

Do you currently belong to any state, local, or national associations for school administrators? Which one(s)?

What are some of the activities of your association in which you participate? What personal or professional goals do you hope to achieve through these forms of participation?

Strategy 4: Maintain Personal and Family Support

List some of the ways you intend to spend more time with your family, engage in leisure activities, or simply take care of yourself during the next several months.

What are some of the personal and professional benefits you hope to achieve?

Suggested Readings

IN ADDITION TO SUGGESTIONS for networks, mentors, and joining professional associations, other resources exist that may be of considerable help to you in your first year as a principal. Quite a few books are currently available to provide you with additional information about many of the things faced each day by school principals—whether new to the job or with a lot of experience.

A Framework for Understanding the Beginning Principalship

Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving schools from within.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1993). *The path to school leadership: A portable mentor.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Leithwood, K., Begley, P. T., & Cousins, J. B. (1995). *Developing expert leadership for future schools.* Washington, DC: Falmer.

Robbins, P., & Alvy, H. (1995). *The principal's companion: Strategies and hints to make the job easier.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Starratt, R. J. (1995). *Leaders with vision.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Thorpe, R. (Ed.). (1995). *The first year as principal: Real world stories from America's principals.* Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

A Personal Leadership Checklist

Goldring, E. B., & Rallis, S. F. (1993). *Principals of dynamic schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Gupton, S. L., & Slick, G. A. (1996). *Highly successful women administrators.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Sagor, R., & Barnett, B. G. (1994). *The TQE principal: A transformed leader.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Wallace, R. (1995). *From vision to practice: The art of educational leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Technical and Managerial Skills

Burleson, C. W. (1990). *Effective meetings: The complete guide.* New York: John Wiley.

Harshman, C. L., & Phillips, S. L. (1994). *Teaming up: Achieving organizational transformation.* San Diego: Pfeiffer.

Haynes, M. E. (1988). *Effective meeting skills: A practical guide for more productive meetings.* Los Altos, CA: Crisp.

Hicks, A. T. (1996). *Speak softly & carry your own gym key: A female high school principal's guide to survival.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Katz, N. H., & Lawyer, J. W. (1991). *Communication and conflict resolution skills.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Kormanski, C. (1999). *The team: Explorations in group process.* Denver: Love.

Quick, T. L. (1991). *Training managers so they can really manage: Confessions of a frustrated trainer.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Williams, A. B. (1993). *More than 50 ways to build team consensus.* Palatine, IL: IRI/Skylight.

A Personal Timeline for Development

Johnson, D. W. (1993). *Reaching out: Interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Learning to Lead by Assisting

Marshall, C. (1992). *The assistant principal: Leadership choices and challenges.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Others' Expectations

Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. M. (1996). *Resiliency in schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Hunsaker, P. L., & Alessandra, A. J. (1980). *The art of managing people.* New York: Touchstone.

Speck, M. (1999). *The principalship: Building a learning community.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Reading the Culture of a School

Anderson, G. L., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. S. (1994). *Studying your own school.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Herman, J., & Winters, L. (1992). *Tracking your school's success.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin.

Finding Resources

Ackerman, R. H., Donaldson, Jr., G. A., & van der Bogert, R. (1996). *Making sense as a school leader.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Alvy, H. B., & Robbins, P. (1998). *If I only knew: Success strategies for navigating the principalship.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Crow, G. M., & Matthews, L. J. (1998). *Finding one's way: How mentoring can lead to dynamic leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Daresh, J. C. (2001). *Leaders helping leaders: A practical guide to administrative mentoring* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

McEwan, E. K. (1998*). How to deal with parents who are angry, troubled, afraid, or just plain crazy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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About the Author

John C. Daresh is currently Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Texas at El Paso. He has served as a consultant for school districts, universities, and state departments of education across the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Daresh has authored more than 100 articles, books, book chapters, and papers dealing with the professional development of school leaders, including **The School Administrator Internship Handbook** published by Corwin Press.

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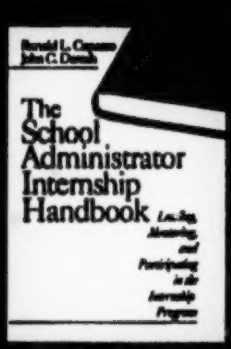

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